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C O M P E N D I U M
O F
S O C I A L R E L I G I O N ;

OR THE
NATURE and CONSTITUTION
O F
C H R I S T I A N C H U R C H E S ,
W I T H T H E

Respective Qualifications and Duties of their
O F F I C E R S and M E M B E R S
Represented in short Propositions, confirmed by Scripture,
A N D

Illustrated with occasional Notes.

D E S I G N E D

As an ESSAY towards reviving the primitive Spi-
rit of Evangelical *Purity, Liberty, and Charity*,
in the Churches of the present Times.

By DANIEL TURNER, M.A.

THE SECOND EDITION CORRECTED.

————— *Sed sapius annis*
A nostris oculos, ad sæcula prisca retorque
Cum rudis & simplex, nondum se fecerat artem
Religio ————— Grot. ad Thuan.

————— *And they that believed were together, and continued in the*
Apostles Doctrine, and breaking of Bread, and Prayers.
Act. ii. 42. 44.

B R I S T O L :

Printed by W. PINE, in Wine-Street, 1778.
Sold by T. EVANS, Broadmead, BRISTOL ; J. BUCK-
LAND, Pater-noster-Row : and J. JOHNSON, St. Paul's
Church-yard, LONDON.

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T H E

INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

MAN, is very justly stiled a *social being*,— he is such by original constitution; he was declared such when he first came out of the hands of his Maker;* and he now comes into the world, with a *disposition for society*, and in a *condition that requires it*.—The first sensations we feel, arise from our wants; our first propensities and desires, tend to the supply of those wants; whence we are led, by a kind of natural *instinct*, into some of the *nearest social connections*, and those interchanges of offices and benefits that arise from them.

As we improve in *rational notions*, and are capable of reflecting upon the nature and ends of our existence; as our *self-love* comes under the influence of *benevolence*, and is di-

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rected

* Gen. ii. 18.

rected and moderated by it, we find ourselves prompted to enlarge our social relations and duties, from more generous and worthy motives.

Much of the wisdom and goodness of providence appears, in giving us this *social capacity and disposition*:—without it—our noblest faculties would be of little or no use to us, for want of proper occasions for their exercise, and proper assistance in it.—*Self-love* alone would be the governing principle; which by blindly mistaking the nature and means of our happiness, and cherishing our malevolent affections, would make us *hateful, and hating one another*; and so, either expose us to the miseries of the most arbitrary oppressions, and cruel hostilities; or oblige us to hide ourselves in the gloomy recesses of friendless solitude.—Whereas, by following the dictates of the *social principle*, we open to ourselves a way, for the abundant employment of all our various geniuses and abilities; and by reciprocal aids and encouragements, render them the most effectually and extensively useful.—*Benevolence*, cherished and supported

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supported by the pleasures always attendant on its proper exercise, maintains its share of governing influence in the heart, teaches us to consider the happiness of others, as inseparably connected with our own, and a principal ingredient in it; and thereby extends our views, warms our desires, and animates our labours for the public good.—Hence domestic and patriot love, order, peace, friendship, and many other public and private virtues and blessings, of the greatest importance to mankind.

Thus God and nature link'd the generous frame,
And bid self-love and social be the same.

But then, *this disposition*, must be *properly cultivated*, in order to produce these happy effects; and *here RELIGION* justly claims our *first and principal* regards.

By RELIGION I mean the *acknowledgement, fear, love, and worship of the DEITY, with a disposition to obey all his known will, founded in the lively belief of his perfections, and a future state of retribution.*—Of this, man as a rational and immortal creature; endowed

with a *moral sense*, or a capacity of perceiving the moral nature and differences, good or evil of things, and of feeling a peculiar pleasure or pain from them, is a proper subject. *This* is the glory of his nature, as *principally* distinguishing him from all other creatures upon earth; and *absolutely necessary* to him as the chief medium of his happiness, temporal and eternal;—necessary, not *only* in his *single* capacity, but *also*, and *eminently* in his *social*. For,

Such is the degeneracy of human nature, that, *without* the influence of *religion, reason and benevolence*, which are absolute requisites to the forming the truly *social* character, would (by degrees at least) be so weakened and impaired, that the *bulk* of mankind would become grossly ignorant, selfish, sordid, ungovernable, pernicious creatures; miserable slaves to their vicious appetites and passions; without *honour*, without *conscience*, or any *effectual* motive to true public spirit; and consequently liable, upon the slightest temptations, to sacrifice the greatest and most important *public* good, to their own *private* interest,

or

or even the lowest sensual gratifications; and thus become the pest and ruin of society.*—

RELIGION, be it *only* that of *nature*, as it is commonly called, will prevent us at least from sinking so low, and doing such prejudice to the *social* interest of mankind: but if *that* of JESUS, sincerely embraced and followed, it will do infinitely more.—The light the gospel throws upon our understandings; and the views it gives us of virtue and vice; the perfections of God; the true felicity of man; the certainty and awfulness of the eternal world; have a peculiar fitness and tendency to pierce and quicken the conscience;

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preserve

* Since I wrote this, I have met with a passage in Dr. Brown's *estimate of the manners and principles of the times*, to the same purpose: "The modern spirit of irreligion (says that ingenious writer) leads to rascally and abandoned cowardice; it quenches every generous hope that can enlarge the soul, and levels mankind with the beasts that perish." The Christian reader may receive still fuller satisfaction on this head from Gen. vi. 11, 12. Psal. i. 14, &c. Rom. i. 21, &c.

preserve its tenderness and sensibility; restrain the inordinate affections of self-love; expand and cherish our benevolence; unite us to each other in the bonds of sacred charity,* inspire us with the hope, and even

* It may possibly be objected here,—*who so uncharitable, censorious, and full of persecuting rancour, as some of your zealous Christians, most distinguished for the orthodoxy of their faith, and the strictness of their devotion?* I answer nothing can be more evident, than that the Christian religion ranks those vices, amongst the greatest sins; condemns all that are guilty of them, to the severest punishments; and by doctrine, precept, example, and every motive that can affect the human heart, inculcates upon all its professors, the opposite virtues; so that it must be the highest injustice, to charge any part, of what is objected, upon *that* religion. And, that any of its professed believers are chargeable with it, is owing, either to their assuming that character, in order to conceal their wicked designs, and justify the violences by which they carry them on; or to superstition, enthusiasm, and the like false notions of religion, joined with a natural moroseness, and malignity of temper; or in a word, to

even assurance, that all the sacrifices we make, of private advantage, to the honour and interest of the public (consistent with our duty) shall be infinitely, though graciously rewarded in the life to come; and consequently, must every way most effectually promote and secure, the happiness of *society*.

The exalted perfection of *social unity and joy*, which prevails in the heavenly world, and felicitates the *general assembly and church of the first born*, is owing to the perfection of their *religion*.—They see the adorable excellencies of the divine nature, in the light of that world.—They feel their obligations to their Redeemer, in the most sensible manner; love, worship and obey the great God, in the perfection of holiness,—and therefore they enjoy their *social* relations with such high satisfaction, and know all the pleasures of the most pure benevolence and friendship, without any of those alienations of heart, contentions,

the want of being under the governing influence of the genuine principles of the gospel.—To the truth of this, every sober conscience must witness.

tentions, and jealousies, that attend the happiest societies here below.

And as *religion*, is thus necessary and beneficial to man, in his *social* capacity ; it is also necessary that his religion should be *social* ; i. e. the duties of it, particularly those respecting the *worship of the Deity*, should be *publicly performed*, as the common concern and *united act* of many.—To this, the social constitution we are under, naturally obliges us.—We are all the offspring of one eternal parent, all under the same general obligations to him, and dependance upon him, interested in common, in many of the same wants and necessities, benefits and mercies ; and therefore ought to offer up our prayers and praises unitedly to him, as the one common head of the social system ; the one common object of our religious reverence, hope, and joy.—And upon this *social piety*, the very *existence* of religion and virtue, in our world, and the preservation of the many benefits to society, connected therewith, eminently depend.—Were religious duties to be practis'd by us *only in private* ; were there no *assembling*

ing of ourselves together; to proclaim its excellencies and usefulness, and bear an open testimony by common consent in its favour; its public estimation would very soon decline; the least appearances of it be marked with disgrace, and treated with contempt and ridicule, by the bulk of mankind; and under such discouragements, even the *private* practice of it by degrees, would be sadly neglected, and very probably at last be, intirely so; by which means, all its influence must soon be lost in the world.—The natural consequence of which, would be, the uncontrollable prevalence of infidelity, prophaneness, injustice, and oppression; till the bonds even of civil society were dissolved, and mankind let loose with all their vicious passions, upon one another to the destruction of all human virtue and happiness*:—The *religion* of man therefore, I say even in this world must be *social*.

This will appear with still clearer and more certain evidence, if we consult the sacred records;

* Quibus sublati (i. e. sanctitas & religio) perturbatio vitæ sequitur & magna confusio.

Cicer. de Nat. Duor. l. 1. §. 2.

cords; for there we shall find, that *social religion* is the *will of God*; and has always been the *practice* of his *people*.—When he separated the seed of *Abraham* as a peculiar and holy nation, to bear his name, and preserve his worship, in opposition to the general idolatry; he commanded *all the males thrice a year to make their appearance before him*, and worship him in one national assembly. And to all that had a true sense of religion, his *public worship*, was peculiarly desirable; as the 84th Psalm in particular witnesses, where in the spirit of truly sublime poetry, the Psalmist strongly expresses, his pious sense of the excellency and importance of *social religion*.—And elsewhere he says, that *dwelling in the house of God*, appearing before him in his public worship, and *beholding his beauty and glory in his sanctuary*, was the one thing he desired, and sought after, with the greatest ardency of affection.†

Under

† Psal. xxvii. 4. Psal. lxiii. 1, 2, 3. Heb. x. 25. Rom. xv. 6. Acts i. 14. chap. ii. 1, 41. chap. ix. 31. chap. xi. 26. 2 Cor. viii. 1. Gal. i. 1.

Under the New Testament dispensation we are charged, not to forsake the *assembling of ourselves together*, 'as the manner of some then was.—But with *one heart, and with one mouth to glorify God*.—And it is said by way of encomium on the first converts to the christian religion, that they *were together with one accord in prayer and praise*.

Our Lord himself also has directed us to address the throne of grace, in the language of *social religion*; and say, *OUR father who art in heaven, &c.* And has made great and precious promises to the duties of piety perform'd in *social unity*.—From such considerations as these, and the more effectually to answer the ends of *social religion*, the apostles of Christ, under the direction of his spirit, formed their converts into distinct regulated societies, called CHURCHES; hence we read of the *Churches of Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Macedonia, Galatia, Asia, &c.* And of the apostles assembling with the church at *Antioch*; and of people being *added to the church*.

Thus it is abundantly evident, that *social religion* in general, and the *constitution of christian*

christian churches in particular, as necessary to the support and practice of it, are of *divine appointment*; ‡—*Or a wise and gracious institution of God, designed for the preservation of true religion, and securing happiness to mankind.*

Every serious christian therefore, if he would follow the dictates of his social nature, the directions of the word of God, and the example of the best of men,—If he would improve himself in the power and comforts of the divine life,—contribute most effectually to the support and propagation of *true religion*,—do the highest honour to God, and the greatest good to the world,—must connect himself

‡ I do not mean to assert, *how far any* of the *particular forms* of church government amongst us, are of divine appointment; but that public worship itself is so, and consequently some orderly assembling together for the purpose.

Vid. Witt. Ægypt. Lib. 2. c. 16. §. 5.

Relig. of Nature Delin. Sect. v.

Hobbes's Leviath. ch. xxxi. Christianity as old as the creation, p. 115. 116, for even the opposers of divine Revelation own this.

himself (as he has opportunity) with some regular christian society, and unite with them, in all the ordinances and duties that God has promised to bless to those important ends.

But then he should take particular care, to be acquainted with the *nature*, and *design* of such *societies*; and the respective duties of their *officers*, and *members*; and do what he does, from a principle of love to God, and religion,—that he may offer to him a *reasonable service*, and fill up his place with propriety and honour; with advantage to himself and the community. Here it is that too many fail.—They enter into the sacred and interesting relation of church fellowship, without knowing, at least without duly considering, the reasons why, or the ends for which they do so. An affectation of extraordinary sanctity, and desire of the applause of men;—the gratifying an ignorant enthusiastic zeal;—or the engaging *deep* in the little interest of a party—are, it is to be feared, too often the ruling motives in this case: at best they look upon it, as little more than entitling them to the

the Lord's Table ; and not as engaging them in any *special relation* and duty to the society they commune with, in particular, and all other truly christian societies in general, and laying them under many peculiar obligations to exemplary purity in heart and life, as it most certainly does. And when this happens to be the case of the greatest and most considerable part of any religious society, either a coldness and inattention to their common interest, will bring upon them an insensible, yet sure dissolution; or spiritual pride, envious emulations, angry contentions, and uncharitable separations tear them to pieces, to the great dishonour of the christian name; and the ruin of that christian charity, which it is the particular design of such institutions to promote.

The intention of these papers therefore, is not to *censure* any *particular form* of church government, which obtains amongst *protestants*; but to contribute, if possible, towards the cure of the above mentioned evils, where they *are*, the preventing them where they

are

are not; and the advancement of *real piety* and *goodness* amongst all:—for tho' I have endeavoured to give my reader as *scriptural a view* as I could, of the *nature, form and order of a christian church*, as necessary to my design in general; yet what I have more largely and particularly insisted on, is, the *ends and duties of the christian profession in general*, and *church relation in particular*, (which are in the *main* the same in *all forms*)—That if possible I might engage his attention, to things *essential* to the being and growth of solid religion; moderate his zeal for mere modes and opinions; cherish his benevolence and charity with respect to other Christians;—And, if need be, convince him of the utter inconsistency of a bigotted narrowness of spirit, with the design of providence in making religion a *social* interest and concern.

I hope therefore, instead of making what I here lay before him, an occasion of wrangling disputes about *church government* and *power*, &c. (which have too much troubled the church already) He will consider it rather as a *compendious system of Christian duties* ac-

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knowledged

known by all; the principal of which, he will find, under the several propositions relating to the work and business of a church, its officers and members; their respective qualifications, and what they owe to one another, to other churches, and to the world; which I have given him from the scriptures, in words at length, not to prevent his looking into the bible, but to encourage him in that important duty, by convincing him, from these specimens, of the excellency and usefulness of *that divine book*, as graciously given us, for *reproof*, for *correction*, and *instruction*, in all *righteousness*.

As to disputable matters, not essential to religion, I have endeavoured to treat them with moderation, and desire my reader to peruse them without prejudice, be open to conviction, and when he differs from me, do it with the same candour and charity with which I differ from him; and make the best of his *own plan*, in the support and propagation of real piety and virtue, 'till he is convinced that he has found a *better*.

I am

I am sensible the more studious and intelligent reader, is acquainted with many better treatises on this subject; but they are either so *large*, as not to come within the compass of the time and capacity, or so very *short*, as not to answer the expectation or necessity of the *common Christian*, for whom, *principally*, I write.—I have therefore endeavoured at a suitable medium, in a *method intirely new*; which I hope, though less *entertaining* to *some*, will not be found less adapted to the solid information, and *real service* of those, who are desirous of being useful and ornamental members of any particular church of Christ, and are sensible of the want of such help as is here intended them.—For, though I have not entered into the subject argumentatively, except here and there briefly in the notes, (as indeed my method and compass would not allow me to do) yet, if any plain Christian, will but properly exercise his own reflections upon the materials he here finds; and, when necessary, take in the assistance of his more judicious friends, he will be able, not only to supply that deficiency, but an-

swer the end of his enquiries, perhaps more to his satisfaction upon the whole, as he will be thereby led to his conclusions, not so much by mere *human* argument, as *divine* authority.

To conclude, as the civil, spiritual, temporal, and eternal happiness of mankind, and the credit of our holy religion in the world, depend *so much* upon the *good order, real holiness, sincere and fervent charity, of Christian churches*; I most heartily wish they could by any means, be prevailed upon to attend to these important things, with more serious and cordial concern.—We ourselves complain (and that justly) of coldness, formality, disorder, and declensions in vital religion, as prevailing amongst us; *the free-thinkers, and infidels* of the age, look upon *all* our churches, with the utmost contempt: and represent them as mere creatures of crafty priests, the *idols* of their infatuated mobs, the supports of their tyranny and ambition; or little nurseries of senseless enthusiasm, bigotry, superstition, and mad zeal.—Would to God we had never given any occasion for such representations! But, could we but once be brought to think,
and

and act, agreeably to the true spirit and genius of the gospel; to place religion, not in the *little nostrums and peculiarities of a party*; but in *sincere repentance towards God, lively faith in our Lord Jesus, and the solid genuine fruits thereof in the works of piety, righteousness, benevolence, charity.*—Instead of violently compelling one another to *uniformity* in lesser matters; could we learn to *differ in opinion, without dividing in affection*; *oppose one another in meekness, forbear one another in love*, and receive with Christian tenderness the *weak in faith*; or, instead of spending our religious zeal upon *modes and forms, and things indifferent*, unite and employ it in promoting *real Christian knowledge*, and following after that *peace and holiness*, without which *no man shall see the Lord.*—

—Were our churches all formed upon such principles, and actuated by such a spirit, they would soon find (even though in other respects they continued still in their different forms) the God of holiness and peace dwelling amongst them—religion revive—the gospel ministry honoured and blessed. And

thus, to their unspeakable satisfaction and comfort, and the utter confusion of the *ignorance of those foolish men*, who delight to reproach them—they would indeed appear to be, what they were originally designed to be,* *seminaries* of divine knowledge, truth, love, piety, and every virtue—living witnesses of the great mercy and love of God to men.—The brightest ornaments of the world, and the greatest blessings to it.

ABINGDON, (*Berks.*)

Jan. 26, 1758.

P. S. : The Reader is desired to observe—That several of the texts produced, are not intended as *direct proofs* of their respective propositions, but rather as *illustrations* only.—And that the few things quoted from *Clemens*, and *Ignatius*, &c. are designed just to hint at the simplicity of those times, and how nearly the constitution of *their* churches agreed

* Psal. xlv. 9, &c. Psal. xlviii. 3. Psal. lxxxvii. 2, 3. Ephes. ii. 21. Phil. ii. 15, 16. Rev. i. 20. Chap. xxi. 2, to the end, will abundantly illustrate and confirm these sentiments.

agreed with that which we find in the holy scriptures, and which in the following pages is (I think) *delineated* from them. (They that would see more of this may consult *Lord King's Enquiry*.)

And lastly, though argument was not my design, yet I have been obliged to add a few things in that form here and there by way of note, as necessary to explain and defend my meaning; which I have done with the sincere intention of promoting the *interest* of *truth*, and the *honour* of *religion*, without regard to any *party* whatsoever;—and which therefore I would have understood, as elucidating hints, rather than peremptory dictates; or as proposals of my present sentiments, to the consideration of the more judicious and candid reader; sentiments which, after twenty years further consideration, I have yet seen no reason to depart from, in any thing material.

ABINGDON, May 16, 1778.



A
C O M P E N D I U M
O F
Social Religion, &c.

C H A P. I.

*Of the Church in general.**

THE Greek word (ἐκκλησία) commonly translated *church*,* originally signifies any convocation or *assembly* of people, civil or

* The English word *church*, as the Scotch *kyrk*, is thought to come from the Greek (οἶκος κυριακός) the house of the Lord, and so is applicable to the *place* of worship; as perhaps, Acts xix: 37. Though it is never used in

2 *The meaning of the word church.* Chap. I.

or *religious*; and is used even in scripture, sometimes in that general sense; as Acts xix. 32, 39, 41. where it is translated *assembly*, and denotes not only a *lawful court of judicature*, as ver. 39. but also the *disorderly multitude* brought together by *Demetrius*, ver. 32. and 41. Though for the most part the sacred writers intend by it a *religious society* or congregation. And thus sometimes it stands—

I. For the *whole number of the truly pious, or peculiar people of God*, who sincerely love and obey him, which is properly and eminently THE CHURCH, the mystical *body* of Christ, given him by the Father before the world began—purchased with his own blood; called, sanctified, preserved by his
word

that sense in the New Testament in any other passage, as I remember, except 1 Cor. xi. 18. *be so understood*—The *people* are called the *house* and *church* of God, 1 Tim. iii. 15.—*Vitringa, de synag. vet. part. 1. chap. i. &c.* has a long and elaborate dissertation on the word *εκκλησια*. See also *Spanhem. Dub. Evan. vol. 2d. Dub. 77.*

Chap. 1. *The meaning of the word church.* 3

word and Spirit in time, and glorified with him in eternity—Which may be called the real or *invisible catholic* or universal church; part of which is triumphant in heaven, and part militant on earth.*

Heb. xii. 23. *The general assembly and church of the first born.*—Col. i. 18. *And he is the head of the body, the church.*—John xvii. 2. *That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.* Ephes. i. 4. *Chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*—Acts xx. 28. *The church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.* 2 Thess. ii. 13. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth.* 1 Pet. i. 5. *Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.* John xvii.

* We have reason to believe that there are many true and proper members of the church, taken in this sense, that are not actually joined in church-fellowship to any particular Christian society. See Dr. Fortin's *Diff.* on the truth of the Christian religion.

4 *The meaning of the word church.* Chap. I.

xvii. 24. *I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.* Heb. xiii. 23. *The spirits of just men made perfect.* Ephes. iii. 15. *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

II. At other times the word *church*, denotes the *whole body* of those that make any *visible profession* of a religious regard to the revealed will of God, and subjection to his more special authority, and government; of which some have the *real power*, others only the *form* of godliness; and which may be called the *apparent or visible catholic * church*.

Heb. ii. 12. *In the midst of the church will I sing praise.* 1 Cor. xii. 12, 28. *The body is one—the church.* Ephes. iii. 10, 21. *Known by the church—Glory in the church.* Matt. xxv. 1, 2. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto ten virgins, five of them were*

* By *visible* is here meant, what falls under human cognizance and judgment, as before by *invisible*, the contrary.

were wise, and five were foolish. Mat. xx.

16. Many be called but few chosen. Mat.

xxii. 11. And when the king came in to see

the guests, he saw there a man that had not

on a wedding garment. See also Mat. xiii.

24. 30. Acts xi. 47. And the Lord added

to the Church such as should be saved.

III. Sometimes the word *church* denotes only one *particular society* of Christians, professedly devoted to God, according to the rules of the gospel, usually meeting for divine worship in one place; or to speak more exactly and fully—— “ A company of
“ persons professedly separating themselves
“ from the sinful ways of the world, in
“ obedience to the call of the gospel; be-
“ lieving in Christ as their Saviour, sub-
“ jecting themselves to him as their spiri-
“ tual Lord and Ruler, voluntarily agreeing
“ together, to partake of the privileges,
“ discharge the duties, and support the means
“ of Christian faith, worship and holiness;
“ making the holy scriptures the sovereign
“ and infallible rule of their religious opi-
“ nions

6 *The meaning of the word church* Chap. 1.

“ nions and practice ; uniting in the same
“ general form of government, and usually
“ meeting together at one and the same time
“ and place, for public religious exercises ;
“ which may be called a *particular visible*
“ *christian church*, of which there is frequent
“ mention in the New Testament, and to which
“ the following rules and observations principally refer*.

C H A P.

* 1st. It is not to be supposed, that all who stand related to particular churches under the formal appearance of that spiritual relation, are members indeed of Christ's spiritual body.—2. The above particulars seem necessary to denominate any christian congregation, a true *orderly gospel church* ; yet where the *essentials* are held, though there be defects in the form, it is to be esteemed a *true* though not an *orderly church*.

Acts ii. 38, &c. *Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, for the promise is to you and your Children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call :—Then they that gladly received the word were baptized,—and there were added three thou-*

Chap. 1. *The meaning of the word church.* 7

and souls.—And they continued stedfast in the Apostle's doctrine, and breaking of bread and prayers;—and all that believed were together—praising God;—and the Lord added to the church such as should be saved.

1. This is a short sketch of the first visible Christian church, and of the chief principles or articles of their association and unity; which may very well serve for a general plan of constitution to all churches.

N. B. I will not deny but that the assemblies of the people called *Quakers* may be true tho' defective churches of CHRIST.

2. Tho' at the time, to which the above texts refer, Christians were not united in the form of a church, yet we have there the outlines of its constitution.



C H A P. II.

Some general observations on the distinguishing characters, nature, and constitution of a particular christian church.

I. **T**HAT a particular christian church, properly consisteth of such a number of persons only, as is sufficient to answer the ends of church fellowship, and may *usually* meet and worship together at the same time, in one convenient place*.

Gal.

* *N. B.* 1st. The above description of a particular christian church, is not very different from that in the 19th article of the *Church of England*; viz. “a congregation of faithful men, in which
“the true word of God is preached, and the
“Sacraments duly administered, according to
“Christ’s ordinances, in all those things that
“of necessity are requisite to the same.”

2^{dly}. *Tertul.* (exhort. de Cast. chap. vii.) says *Ubi tres ecclesia est*,—three make a church.—But the scripture has fixed no precise number.

Chap. 2. *The number constituting a church.* 9

Gal. i. 22. *The churches of Judea*—Acts viii. 1. chap. xiii. 1. *The church at Jerusalem—at Antioch.* 1 Cor. xiv. 33. *All the churches of the saints.* Acts ix. 31.

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3dly. That every such *particular church* is to be esteemed a part of the *universal church*, or general body called by that name; and whether there be few, or many of them at the same time in the world (if really churches of Christ) they have *all* the same common head, faith, laws, powers, privileges,—and therefore, though differing in lesser matters, and not authoritatively subject to one another, *may* and *ought* to hold the Communion of saints with each other, as the means of preserving and cherishing the common unity of the universal Church,—*keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; not only in respect of themselves, but of all true Christians throughout the world. Their being formed into distinct communities being only intended for their better edification, and not for the supporting *opposite* interests, and little ecclesiastical *Factions*, as too many seem to imagine. *Ephes. ii. 15, 21. John x. 16.* (see the conclusion.)—And thus every regular *member* and *minister* of the word, in any *particular*

10 *The number constituting a church.* Chap. 2.

The churches throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria. Rom. xvi. 5. *The church in their*

church, is in fact a *member* and *minister* of the church *universal* : and though under special obligations to *that* particular church, yet hath a right to commune with, or minister to any *other* upon all proper occasions, as parts of the same whole.

4thly. Because the Apostle says *the churches* in the plural, 1 Cor. xiv. 34, and yet directs his epistle to the *church* in the singular, 1 Cor. i. 2. Some think there were *several* churches or congregations at *Corinth*, united under *one bishop*, after the present *Diocesan* form amongst us.— But it should be observed (1st.) there is no certain mention made of any *bishop*, or even *elder*, at that time in the church at *Corinth*; and it is questionable, whether there were any such officer or officers at that time appointed amongst them, as this was not usually done upon the first gathering of a church.

(2d.) That the Apostle wrote this epistle for *all* the churches, though he addressed it particularly to them. 1 Cor. i. 2.

(3d.) That as the members of the *Corinthian church* were scattered up and down the city,

Chap. 2. *The number constituting a church.* 11

their house. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Rev. i. 11.

The seven churches of Asia (minor). 1 Cor.

C 2

xiv.

and its adjacencies, they might sometimes occasionally assemble in different places, and in distinct congregations for particular convenience,—which assemblies might (in the more general sense of the word) be called *churches*, yet more commonly, and upon all important and solemn occasions, they might all meet at one time in one place; and from 1 Cor. xiv. 23. chap. xi. 18, 28. it is evident they actually did so.—And it seems so far from the genius of those times, to unite *several churches* under one bishop, that we find one church had *several* bishops; Acts xx. 16, 18. Philip. i. 1. The like may be noted in objection to the strict Presbyterian form of government.

5thly. The main question I apprehend here is, whether one particular congregation of Christians, who might meet together with all their officers in one place, at one time, for the ends of church-fellowship; or several such congregations, who could not all so meet in one body, and yet were otherwise united under one episcopal or presbyterial form of government, be properly a *chris-*

12 *The number constituting a church.* Chap. 2.

xiv. 23. *If therefore the whole church be come together in one place.*

II. Such

tian church?—Towards the just solution of which it may not be amiss to note farther,

(1st.) That the number of christians at *Ephesus* was very great in a little time after the gospel was preached there, as appears from *Acts* xx. 31. chap. xix. 10, 20. 1 *Cor.* xvi. 8, 9. And that it is probable they sometimes met in different parts of the city, in little distinct congregations; as for instance in the house of *Aquila*, where was a *church* as it is called, 1 *Cor.* xvi. 19. compared with *Acts* xviii. 18, 19, 26. *Rom.* xvi. 5.—And yet, for aught appears to the contrary, the whole might meet together in one place at once.—The whole is called *the church of Ephesus*, over which the Holy Ghost had set several elders or bishops. *Acts* xx. 17, 28. And though in the apostle *John's* time one of them might by common consent be the chief or president, and, therefore perhaps, called *the angel of the church of Ephesus* (as *Rev.* ii. 1.) yet they might still be all of the same order and authority.—From *Ephesus* the gospel spread over *Asia*. *Act* xix. 10. And several churches were consti-

II. Such a church, is a body *distinguished* from the *civil societies* of the world, by the *spiritual* nature and design of its constitution and government; and avowedly *separated*

C 3

from,

tuted at no great distance from it, which notwithstanding are not spoken of in the scripture, as *subject* to the church there, or conjoined with it in the present *Diocesan* or *Presbyterian* form. And though it be allow'd,

(2d.) That the church at *Jerusalem* at the time spoken of in the acts of the Apostles, consisted of a great multitude. Acts i. 15. We read of 120. Acts ii. 41. of 3000 more. Acts iv. 4. of 5000 more. Acts v. 14. of multitudes. Acts xxi. 20. of many thousands of Jews who believed,—yet it should be observed also that great numbers of these converts were only *occasionally* at Jerusalem, at the time of their conversion; as appears from Acts ii. 9, 10.—They are stiled the church in the singular. Acts ii. 47. chap. viii. 1. chap. v. 11. chap. xv. 4.—This church or multitude are called together; Acts vi. 2. and chap. xxi. 22.—This church is said to receive the deputation from Antioch, Acts xv. 4. And the *whole church*, as distinguished from the apostles and elders, is said to consent to the de-

from, and *opposed* to the usurped kingdom and power of satan in the world: the members

cree, ver. 22.—This church had *several elders*, as appears, *Acts* xi. 30. chap. xxi. 18. Amongst these the apostle *James* indeed is *particularized*, but no mention made of any *episcopal* power that he exercised over the rest of the elders; though it is probable he did occasionally *preside* at their meetings of business. Nor does it appear to me that this church consisted of several distinct congregations, with their *respective Presbyters*, united under one proper *presbyterial government*; otherwise than that the several *elders* of this church might occasionally meet together, as a committee of the church, under the presidency and direction of the apostolical authority, to prepare matters for a general consideration and consent; as it is plain they did, *Acts* xv. 6, 22.—And thus upon the whole, it appears to me.—

3d. That though the churches of *Corinth*, *Ephesus*, *Jerusalem*, &c. were very large, and sometimes might meet in distinct bodies, in several parts of their respective cities;—yet at other times, in matters of general concern, they met at *once*, in *one place* there. 1 *Cor.* xiv. 23.—And that if it had been the apostolic practice,

bers of this body professedly renouncing the sinful practices and maxims of the world,

C 4

and

to unite the several distinct congregations with their officers, in one *episcopal* or *presbyterial* government, all the churches in *Judea* would naturally have been included and formed into one such church.—Those of *Asia* into another, &c. and then we should have read of the church of *Judea*, the church of *Asia* (as we do now of the church of *England*, and the church of *Scotland*) instead of the churches of *Judea*, *Asia*, &c. as we do read.

(4) Nor does it appear to me from the apostolic fathers *Clemens* or *Ignatius*, that a christian church in their time was any other than one single congregation, usually meeting in one place at one time; or that a bishop then was any more than the president, pastor or elder, of such single congregation, or parish as they were sometimes styled, as dwelling near together. Hence St. Clement addresses his epistle to the church (*παροικία*) *parishing* at Rome; tho' when the congregation was large, there were more than one such officer: St. Ignatius speaks of the church at *Philadelphia*, as having *ἐν θυσιαστηρίῳ, πρὸς ἐπισκοπὴν, ἀπὸ τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου καὶ τοῖς διακονοῖς*

and devoting themselves to God through Christ, in obedience to the call of the gospel,

i. e. *One altar, as one bishop, together with the presbytery and deacons.* Ep. ad Phil. ch. iii. See also Epist. ad Tral. ch. i. iii. Nor will the candid advocates for the present Diocesan Episcopacy deny, but that the mode of *one bishop to one church* obtained in the first ages. Bochart in his epistle to Dr. Morley, has these remarkable words—"Rectè observat vir doctissimus, in
" *episcopatu tria esse quæ non sunt confundenda; πρεσβυτεριον seu pastorale Munus, quod*
" *Episcopis scriptura tribuit; υπεροχην five emi-*
" *nentiam in reliquos Pastores, quam illis concessit Ecclesia vetus; et dominatum in Do-*
" *mini cleros, quem in hec sæculorum sæce*
" *nonnulli protervè sibi arrogârunt. Proinde*
" *primum esse divini juris; secundum ecclesiasti-*
" *ci, tertium verò nullius, et meram Usurpa-*
" *tionem.* See chap. iii. prop. v."

But if the great ends of Social Religion, which are the advancement of evangelical piety and virtue, be answered, the *mere form and manner* of doing it cannot be of that vast importance some people imagine; tho' that which is the most simple and easy, one would think should be al-

pel, and the hope of eternal life according to its promises.

John

ways preferred, as best agreeing with the genius of the gospel, and the original plan pointed out for our imitation by the practice of the apostles, and their immediate successors. And here note

1. That the *church*, or *kingdom of Christ*, is very different from the *kingdoms* of this *world*. The *church* is a spiritual society, whose *business* and *privileges* are of a *spiritual* nature. The *kingdoms* of this *world* relate to the *temporal* interest and rights of mankind. Yet

2. No particular congregation of Christians, or the whole Christian church, is to be understood as a society *independent* on, or *contradistinct* from the state, or civil government of the country where it exists, in any *civil respects*; or in regard of any of the duties the members thereof would *otherwise* owe thereunto, *Rom. xiii. 1, 2. &c.* But is opposed to the *moral pollutions* and *wickedness* of the world; i. e. their ecclesiastical confederation must be always consistent with their obligations as men, and with all their natural and political relations in life.—Or in a word, the *church* is neither the *creature* nor the

John xviii. 36. *My kingdom is not of this world.* See 2 Cor. x. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 17.

Come

rival of the state; and though a *spiritual kingdom*, and in that respect *not of this world*—Yet, while in it, is subject to all those *just laws and powers* that God has ordained for the good government of the world: (See chap. iv. prop. iv. sect. 5.)

3. It may also be farther noted, that this description agrees to all professing Christians in general, whether actually associated in church-fellowship or not—They are, by that very profession, to be reckoned under a different denomination from the rest of the world. But it is more particularly and especially the case of every regular Christian society. And the reader is desired to observe the same in respect of the application of several of the scriptures hereafter quoted.

4. Let it be farther particularly observed, That the *papal church of Rome*, which claims the title of the HOLY CATHOLICK CHURCH, exclusive of all others, is the most inconsistent of all with the scripture account of a *gospel church*: and, indeed, in most things *essential* to the constitution, unity, design, and purity of that *holy body*,

Come out from amongst them and be ye separate. John xvii. 16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. John xv. 19. I have chosen you out of the world. Rom. xii. 2. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed. Heb. xi. 13, 15, 16. And confessed that they were strangers

directly opposed to it. Witness her pretended infallibility—The supremacy of her Pope—Her arrogant claims of power over the consciences of men, and even the scriptures of God—Her affectation of worldly pomp and grandeur, and endeavours to support it by the arts of carnal and wicked policy—Her most abominable idolatries and superstitions; and her cruel and bloody persecutions of the sincere lovers, and conscientious followers of JESUS CHRIST.—So that even the world itself, in the bad sense of the word, or as the kingdom of Satan, is not more directly opposed to the true church of Christ, than this church of Rome; I mean as a church, for I speak not of every individual in her outward communion, amongst whom there are doubtless some truly pious members of CHRIST's true church.

gers and pilgrims on earth—seeking a better country, even an heavenly. Phil. iii. 20. Our conversation is in heaven. 2 Thes. ii. 13, 14.—Salvation, whereunto he called you by one gospel. 1 Pet. ii. 9. An holy nation, a peculiar people,—called out of darkness into marvellous light. 1 Cor. i. 2. Sanctified in Christ, and called. See Col. i. 13. Acts xxvi. 18. To turn them from the power of Satan unto God.

III. They own Christ as their only Saviour, and the Sovereign of their consciences; and his word as the only perfect and infallible rule of their faith and practice, in matters of religion.

Matt. i. 21. He shall save his people from their sins. Acts iv. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other. Isa. xlv. 21. A just God, and a Saviour, and there is none beside me. Gal. iii. 26. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Rom. x. 9. If thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus thou shalt be saved. Matt. xxiii. 9. For one is your master, even Christ.

Christ. Acts x. 36. *He is Lord of all.* Col. i. 18. *He is the head of the body, the church.* Isa. viii. 20. *To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* Matt. xv. 9. *In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* Gal. vi. 16. *As many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them.* See also Ephes. ii. 20. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

IV. Such a church is a *voluntary society*,* formed by mutual agreement and confederation

* By a *voluntary society*, here, I don't mean, that men are under no obligation to embrace the gospel when proposed to them—Nor that it is a matter of indifference, whether (having embraced the gospel as a divine revelation) they join themselves to any Christian society; for these are both evident, though not equally important duties: but I mean that the embracing the Christian religion in general, and the connecting ourselves with some Christian society in particular, should be matter of *rational choice*, and not of *compulsion*; the effect of inward con-

tion—profession of the same general articles of faith, and order—submission to Christ by the same common sign or token of devotion to God, viz. *baptism* with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, giving themselves up to the Lord and to one another in the Lord, meeting together at time and place appointed for religious worship, as frequently and constantly as is convenient and necessary to answer the ends of public religion.^a

1. It is a voluntary society, formed by mutual agreement, &c.*

Acts

visions, and not outward violence. Nor does this proposition respect the church in general, but the constitution of *particular societies.* *Sed nec religionis est cogere religionem, quæ sponte suscipi debeat non vi.*

Tertul. ad Scapulam.^b

* So that a person becomes a member of any particular church, by his proposing or declaring his desire and willingness to unite with it in the order of the gospel, and to hold communion with it in all its special ordinances; and by the members of the church signifying their accep-

Acts ii. 44. *And all that believed were together, ver. 46. with one accord.* Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another.* Isa. lxiv. 5. *One shall say I am the Lord's—and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord.* Rom. xv. 6. *That ye may with one mouth glorify God.*

2. Profession of the same general faith, hope, and order.*

Ephes.

tance of the proposal. And as this very transaction implies in it the nature of a *covenant*, or *mutual compact* and *stipulation*, for all the respective duties and privileges of that relation:—It appears to me therefore *sufficient* for the purpose, without a *formal* assent and consent to a *written covenant*.

* 2. Without some *tolerable* agreement in sentiments in respect of the *essential* articles of the Christian faith, there can be no proper unity, and very little edification and comfort expected in a church relation.—Though great care should be taken not to impose *unscriptural terms* of communion, or to insist upon a uniformity in every little nicety about the mere circumstances of

Ephes. iv. 5. *One Lord, one faith.* ver. 4. *One hope of your calling.* 1 Cor. i. 10. *I beseech you brethren that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions amongst you, but that you be perfectly joined together in one mind, and one judgment.* 2 Cor. ix. 13. *Your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ.*

3. Submission to the same token of devotion to Christ, viz. *Baptism.*

Ephes. iv. 5. *One baptism.* Matt. xxviii. 19. *Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Gal. iii. 27. *As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put*
on

faith and worship; for else some weak, sincere consciences must be hurt, or the peace and unity of the church be broken.—See prop. v. sect. 3. The bond of this unity in a particular church is the same as that of the church universal, viz. Their being brought by one spirit to centre in Christ as their only Saviour, and the practice of the same common duties of the Christian life.

on Christ. Acts viii. 12. *And when they believed, they were baptized, both men and women.* Acts viii. 36. *See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?* See chap. ii. prop. viii. sect. 3. note.

4. Giving themselves to the Lord, and one another * in the Lord.

2 Cor. viii. 5. *But first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.* Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another.* Acts v. 14. *Believers were added to the Lord.*

5. Meeting together at one time and place for religious worship, as frequently and constantly as may be convenient and necessary to answer the ends of public religion.

1 Cor. xiv. 23. *If therefore the whole church be come together in one place.* Heb.

D x. 25.

* 1. That is, they profess to devote themselves to the service of God, and to receive, and treat one another as Christians, and brethren in the faith and hope of the gospel.

x. 25. *Not forsaking the assembling ourselves together as the manner of some is.*

V. The *essence* * of church-fellowship lies, in partaking of the same spirit and grace of Christ—standing in the same relation to him—enjoying his spiritual presence in the same ordinances—performing the same common duties, with unity of heart and affection—and in the expectation of the same glorious immortality.

1. In partaking of the same Spirit of Christ.

1 Cor. vi. 17. *He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.* John i. 16. *And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.* Rom. viii. 9. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* Isa. lix. 21. *This is my covenant with them,*

* By *essence* here, I mean the main ground and reason on which church-fellowship depends; and that in which it chiefly consisteth, or ought to consist.

them, saith the Lord, my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart for ever.

2. Standing in the same relation to him.

Gal. iii. 28. You are all one in Christ Jesus. 1 Cor. xii. 13. For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body. Rom. xii. 5. So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another. Rom. viii. 17. If children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

3. Enjoying his spiritual presence, in the same ordinances, and performing the same common duties, with unity of heart.

1 Cor. x. 16, 17. The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?—The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?—for we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of one bread. Acts ii. 42. And they continued stedfast in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in break-

ing of bread, and in prayers. Acts i. 14.

They all continued with one accord in supplications and prayers. Acts iv. 32. The

multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and one soul.* Matt. xxviii. 20.

Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. 1 Cor. x. 3, 4. All eat the

same

* And therefore it appears to me, that the forms and modes of worship observed in every church, should be as plain and scriptural as possible: that none who are weak, yet sincere, may be embarrassed and stumbled,—nor any occasion of contention and discord be administered;—and on the other hand, none should indulge a whimsical nicety about things indifferent; but all endeavour to practise mutual forbearance and charity;—for though in our present state of imperfection it is impossible we should be all of one opinion or judgment, in every point of religion; yet we may be one in true Christian condescension, affection and love;—and to that our common relation to Christ, participation of his spirit, and hope of eternal life oblige us. See Ephes. iv. 3, 6. See prop. iv. sect. 2d. note there, and the conclusion.

same spiritual meat—all drink the same spiritual drink.

4. And in the expectation of the same glorious immortality.

Ephes. iv. 5. *One hope of your calling.*

Col. i. 27. *Christ in you the hope of glory.*

Tit. ii. 13. *Looking for that blessed hope.*

Heb. iii. 1. *Partakers of the heavenly calling.*

Gal. v. 5. *For we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*

VI. The chief *ends* of church fellowship are—the preservation of the faith, worship, and blessings of the gospel in their power and purity—The support and encouragement of the public ministry of the word, for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the saints—And the continual manifestation of the wisdom, power, grace and glory of God by Christ in the world.

1. The preservation of the faith of the gospel.

D 3

Rom.

Rom. iii. 2. *To them were committed the oracles of God.* Phil. i. 27. *Striving together for the faith of the gospel.* 1 Cor. xi. 2. *And keep the ordinances as I have delivered them unto you.*

2. The support and encouragement of a public ministry, for conversion and edification.

Ephes. iv. 11, 12. *He gave some apostles, some prophets—some pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry—for the edifying the body of Christ.* Psal. lxxxvii. 5. *And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her.* 1 Pet. i. 23. *Born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God.* ver. 25. *And this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

3. For manifesting the grace and glory of God in the world.

Ephes. iii. 10. *To the intent that now might be made known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God,* ver. 21.—*To him be*

*be glory in the church, by Jesus Christ.**

Rev. i. 20.

VII. The chief *advantages* of church fellowship, are drawing near to God in special ordinances,—and that under special promises of his presence, and blessing,—the having many special obligations and encouragements to holiness;—from their own solemn vows and promises; the care, watchfulness, admonitions, counsels, prayers, example, and all other spiritual assistance of their ministers and fellow members; to which they have a special right and title,—together with a joint interest in all the temporal possessions of the church,—and such support and relief, as they may through poverty at any time have

D 4

occasion

* These and many other passages of scripture, though spoken of the church in general, are applicable to particular churches as parts of the whole, under the same government and blessing; and constituted and preserved in a visible form for the same general ends. Rev. i. 20.
And the seven candlesticks are the seven churches.

occasion for, and the church is able to give them.

1. Drawing near to God in * special ordinances.

Psal. lviii. 2. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary; Psal. lxxxiv. 4. blessed are they that dwell in thy house; Psal. lxxv. 4. blessed is the man whom thou causest to dwell in thy courts,—we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house;—1 Cor. x. 16. the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which

* The more special ordinances under the gospel, are *baptism, the Lord's supper, and church discipline*; which properly belong only to such as more particularly and solemnly devote themselves to God in church communion.—The rest such as *hearing the word, public prayer and praise*, belong to all in common that are willing to attend them; being the appointed means of their instruction in, and conversion to the faith and holiness of the gospel,

which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

2. Under special promises of his presence and blessing.

Pfal. lxxxvii. 2. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, ver. 5.—The highest himself shall establish her. Isa. lix. 21. My spirit, and my word shall not depart out of thee:—Mat. xviii. 20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Psal. cxxxii. 15. I will abundantly bless her provisions, and satisfy her poor with bread. Psal. xcii. 13, 14. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God;—they shall bring forth fruit in old age;—they shall be fat and flourishing. Jer. xxiii. 4. I will set shepherds over them that shall feed them; neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord. Pl. cxxxii. 13. For the Lord hath chosen Zion, he hath desired it for his habitation. 2 Cor. vi. 16. For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell

dwell in them, and walk in them, &c. Ephes. ii. 21, 22.

3. Special obligations to holiness.

1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?—if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. chap. vi. 19.*

4. From their own solemn vows and promises.

Judges xi. 35. *I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and cannot go back.—Ps. lvi. 12: Thy vows are upon me O God: I will render praises unto thee. See Deut. xxiii. 21, 22. Ps. lxxvi. 11.—2 Tim. ii. 19. Let him that nameth the name of Jesus depart from iniquity. Rom. vi. 3, 4.*

5. The spiritual assistance of their ministers and fellow members.

Jer. iii. 15. *And I will give you pastors which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. James v. 16. Pray for one another;—the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous*

righteous man availeth much. Heb. x. 24.
*Consider one another to provoke unto love and
good works.* Pl. cxli. 5. *Let the righteous
smite me it shall be a kindness;—let him re-
prove me it shall be an excellent oil.*

6. Joint interest in the churches posses-
sions, and charitable relief when needed.

*Act ii. 44, 45. All that believed were to-
gether and had all things in common*, and
sold their goods and possessions, and parted
them to all men, as every man had need.
Mat. xxvi. 11. Ye have the poor always
with you. Gal. ii. 10. We remember the
poor.*

VIII. The chief *work and business* of a
church lies, in a due regard to the ordinances
of divine worship, and godly discipline.

Rev.

* This common interest *now* must not be un-
derstood of private property, but only of such
estates, and possessions as belong to the church,
as a body or society. See note chap. v. prop.
1. and that no farther than the *public uses* and
advantages arising therefrom.

Rev. xxii. 9. *Worship God.* Ephes. iii. 21. *To him be glory in the church.* 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40. *Let all things be done to edifying,—decently and in order.*

I. Divine worship in the church consisteth,
—in prayer with thanksgiving,—singing the
praises of God,—due administration of, and
attendance upon the word and sacraments,—
and contributions to the necessity of the
saints.—

1. Prayer with thanksgiving.—

1 Tim. i. 1. *That first of all supplications, prayers and giving of thanks be made for all men.* 1 Tim. ii. 8. *I will that men pray every where.* Acts i. 14. *These all continued with one accord, with prayer and supplication.* Phil. iv. 6. *By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be known unto God.* Ps. l. 14. *Offer unto God thanksgiving.* Acts xii. 5. *But prayer was made for the church.*

2. Singing the praises of God.—

Ps. xcv. 1. *O come let us sing unto the Lord.* Ps. cxlix. 1. *Sing unto the Lord a
new*

new song, in the congregation of saints.
 Ephel. v. 19. *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. So Col. iii. 16. Mat. xxvi. 30. And when they had sung an hymn.*

3. Attendance upon the due administration of the word and sacraments*.

Mat.

* That *baptism* and the *Lord's Supper* are divine institutions designed to continue through all the ages of the church in this world, *must*, one would think, plainly appear to every considerate unprejudiced reader of the scriptures.

1. As to *baptism*. This rite was practised by *John the Baptist* at the first opening of the gospel dispensation, to signify the *free remission of sins*, to all true penitents through faith in the Messiah; compare Mat. iii. 6, 7, with Acts ii. 38. *Christ* himself submitted to this rite, as administered by *John*; not indeed with the same views, or to the same ends, with others; but as pointing out by his example, the duty of christians in general:—He also gave his ministers, a commission and order, to *baptize all the nations they taught*, Mat. xxviii. 19. and from *John* iii.

Mat. xvi. 15. *Go preach the gospel to every creature.* Mat. xxviii. 19. *Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, &c.* Mat. xiii. 43. *Who hath ears to hear let him hear.* Acts xiii. 15, 16, 38, 44. *After the reading the law and the prophets.—*

5. compared with Acts ii. 38, 41. chap. viii. 12. Heb. x. 22. 1 Cor. vi. 11. It appears that being baptized was the common external token of subjection to Christ, and of a *regular* entrance into his *visible church*:—And that this was understood of *water baptism*, is plain from the practice of the apostles and primitive ministers. See Acts viii. 36, 37, 38. and Acts x. 47, 48. where *water baptism* is spoken of, as applicable to those who had received (or been baptized with) the *Holy Ghost* before, and for that reason. And if this was to be practised in *all* nations where the gospel was received, as our Lord declares, it must necessarily be a standing institution in the church.—And this will farther appear if we consider that its *reasons*, *significations* and *uses* are, in the main, *always the same*; such as *pardon* and *purification*, Acts ii. 38. Acts xxii. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21. Heb. x. 22. *Union* and *communion* with Christ, and *participation* of his

prophets,—Paul stood up and said,—through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins;—and the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God.—Luke xxii. 19. This do in remembrance of me. 1 Cor. xi. 26. As oft as ye eat

spirit. 1 Cor. xii. 13, 14. our subjection to him. Gal. iii. 27. the likeness of his death and resurrection, and our interest therein. Rom. vi. 4, 8.

2d. As to the Lord's Supper,—he himself intimates that our eating and drinking therein is to be considered as an act of religious worship, being performed with prayer and thanksgiving, and a particular remembrance of him, and especially his death. Luke xxii. 19. And this the apostle says he *received* of the Lord to deliver to the churches, and describes the management of it. 1 Cor. xi. 23.—calls it the *Lord's Supper*, ver. 20. says it is designed to *shew forth*, i. e. preserve the lively remembrance of *the Lord's death* amongst his people *till he come*, ver. 26.—That the communion of the bread and wine *signifies*, our participation of the benefits of his death, considered as a sacrifice offered to God once for all, to take away our sins, and give life to our souls; and that we are devoted to the service, and

eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

4. And contributions to the necessities of the saints.

Heb. xiii. 16. *To communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

1 Cor.

made partakers of the favour of that God to whom it was offered. 1 Cor. x. 16, 18. He commands the Corinthians to keep the ordinances, particularly *this*, of which he was then speaking, 1 Cor. xi. 2. *as he had delivered them.* And it is evident that the reasons, ends, and benefits of this appointment, as much concern christians in one, as in another age of the church; especially the latter ages, as being more remote from the great transaction therein remembered and celebrated.—And it does also as particularly concern one church as another, for the apostle wrote not only to the Corinthians, but *to all that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.* 1 Cor. i. 2. So that it is a duty incumbent upon all who expect salvation by Christ, and wish from their hearts to live in obedience to his gospel, though ever so weak in faith, contrary to the notions of some over scrupulous Christians.

1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. *Now concerning the collection for the saints,—upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store.—Acts x. 4. Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

II. Godly discipline, consisteth in due execution of the laws of Christ, given to the church, relative to the appointment of its officers,—The reception, government, and exclusion of its members, and the decent management of all its affairs to its edification.—

All which, with several other particulars, will be considered in the next chapter.



E

C H A P. III.

Some observations and rules relative to the power, officers and duties of a christian church.

I. **T**HAT every particular church, rightly constituted, hath within itself full power and authority from the Lord Jesus Christ, for the exercising all ecclesiastical discipline, rule and government, and putting in execution all the laws of Christ, necessary to its own edification*.

Heb.

*1. This right and power of particular churches arises from the very nature of their constitution, or their being free and voluntary societies.—And this power is necessary to every particular church for its preservation, and continuance in the form of a society. 1 Cor. v. 12. *Ye judge those within, God shall judge those without.*

2. No church power, or authority, can absolve or excuse any from the obedience due to magistrates, and the just laws of their country,

Heb. iii. 6. *Christ as a son in his own house.* Ephes. i. 20, 22. *The head of all things*
 E 2

nor any way interfere with the same : Though when those magistrates and laws inroach upon the natural rights of conscience, we ought to obey God rather than man, Rom. xiii. 1. Acts iv. 19.

3. No church has any power from Christ, to punish the bodies, seize the property, or imprison the persons of their offending members, or to impose any thing upon their consciences. The authority of such societies consisting only in brotherly admonition, and reproof ; or at most separation from the special privileges of church fellowship with *themselves* ;—as is evident from the whole tenor of the rules and laws Christ has given them, and from the practice of the primitive Christians. Yet,

4. As there are several circumstantial and incidental things concerning the *time, place, manner, &c.* of worship, and the management of the mere externals of religion, not *expressly* provided for by Jesus Christ, but left to human determination, and the prudential application of the general rule.—*Let all things be done decently and in order, to edification* ; it necessarily follows,

things to the church. Mat. xviii. 15, 16, &c. If thy brother shall trespass against thee

that churches have a power of prescribing to themselves such particular methods, forms and rules, respecting these things, as they judge most agreeable to that general rule, and the ends proposed by it.—And accordingly we read in the apostle's time of the *custom* of the churches, 1 Cor. xi. 16.—Though no church has a power of binding such forms, &c. upon the consciences of those that think differently about them.

5. But this power does not appear to me from the scriptures, to be given to the *bishops or elders*, without the *people*, or to the *people*, without the *bishops or elders*, but to the *whole body*; though an *executive* power, must, if there be any order, be necessarily lodged with the bishops or elders, by consent of the church. See chap. iii. prop. vii. sec. 2. note. and prop. viii. And that this was the state of the church with respect to the power of the people even in the third century, appears from many passages in the epistles of *Cyprian*, particularly. *Epist. 14. sect. 4. p. 33. Bp. of Oxford's edit. and epist. 67. sect. 2. page 171, 172.*

thee tell him alone (a);—if he neglect to hear thee, take one or two more;—if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the CHURCH (b);—if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Whatsoever ye bind (c) on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;—for where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them. Acts xv. 22, 25.—It pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men, saying, it seemed good unto us, assembled with one accord, &c. 1 Cor. v. 4. In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye [the church of Corinth] are gathered together, to deliver such a one to Satan (d). 2 Thes. iii. 6. We command you brethren that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. Ephes. iv. 11, 12. He gave some apostles,—prophets,—pastors,—teachers, for the edifying the body of Christ. Acts vi.

E 3

3. Brethren

(a) This procedure of telling the offending brother of his offence alone, seems only to re-

3. *Brethren look ye out from amongst you seven men, &c.*

II. Notwithstanding the *independency* of particular churches, it is oftentimes *necessary* or at least *prudent* for them, in order to the promoting the common interest of religion, their own mutual comfort, purity, and edification,

spect such offences as may happen between man, and man, or such sins against God as are known to the offended brother, but not to others; and therefore must not be made a rule for more public offences.

(b) By the *church* here some will have it we are to understand the *sanhedrim*, or some public court of civil judicature, which if the offender would not regard, he might be prosecuted in the Roman courts as if he was a mere heathen; and consequently that this was a rule for the conduct of the disciples at that present time only, and not for the conduct of a *christian church*, which they say had no existence when this rule was given.—To which it may be reply'd, That this is a very unwarrantable interpretation of the *εκκλησία* in the case and circumstances before us.—That it is very improbable Christ should give

fication, to hold special correspondence, and the *communion of saints* with each other, and unite their counsels by the *social meeting* of their respective *elders* and *messengers* by agreement; provided they assume no arbitrary ju-

E 4

risdiction,

his disciples a rule in respect of an œconomy that was just going to cease. But that it was no unusual thing with him to speak proleptically, or by way of anticipation, or give rules for the after conduct of his disciples, as he evidently does in the 18th and following verses.—That the power of the church here is at most rejection from their communion or brotherly relation, which does not agree with the nature of a civil court of judicature : And that as this passage is so evidently connected with the 18th and following verses, the whole appears a very clear, consistent and important declaration of the power and authority given to a christian church, and a rule for the exercise of it, for its purity and edification. Though supposing this, I do not see that any church can from hence claim a power of excommunication against its members, for any differences amongst them, where *only* human frailty, and not real immorality appears,

risdiction, or decisive power and authority over any particular churches, or persons, nor attempt any thing prejudicial to, or inconsistent with, their just rights and liberties.

— IN VERBIS ON CHURCHES. ACTS

as is too often the case. See Dr. Doddridge's note on this text, in his *Fam. Epist.*

(c) As to the power of binding and loosing, if it be understood of the church's censures, it can mean no more, I apprehend, than that so far as they are agreeable to the will of Christ and his laws, he will own them for the ends of their appointment.

(d) By *delivering to satan*, I suppose, some reference may be had to the punishment peculiar to those miraculous times and powers given to the church, or its extraordinary officers at least; (compare Act. v. 1—11. chap. xiii. 6, &c. 1 Cor. iv. 21. 2 Cor. x. 6, 8. chap. xiii. 10.) But as the world lying in wickedness from which the church is separated, is in a sense the *kingdom of satan*; so when any one is separated from the church, he is consequently returned again to the world or kingdom from whence he came; and in that respect may be said to be *delivered to satan*; which is just the same thing as what our Lord calls, his being to us as an *hea-*

Acts xv. 2, 22. *They (of Antioch) determined that Paul and Barnabas, and others, should go to Jerusalem; and it pleased the apostles, and elders, and the whole church [at Jerusalem] to send chosen men to Antioch—upon the question about circumcision*, &c. Phil. i. 27. Striving together for the faith of the gospel. 1 Thes. ii. 14. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches in Judea.*

III. That there be some, one or more in every particular church, invested with official

then man and a publican.—Though still he is to be treated with all christian compassion, and as having a right to all natural and civil duties and respect. See more chap. iii. under the head of *Excommunication.*

* Thus in effect there was a *synodal assembly*, or *association*, held by the messengers, delegates, or deputies of the two first christian churches; one of *Jews* from *Jerusalem*, the other of *Gentiles* from *Antioch*; which I should think is sufficient to authorize some special communion of churches for advice and counsel. Mosheim, Eccl. Hist. Cen. 2 chap. ii.

cial power, is necessary, and of divine appointment, for the due administration of the word and sacraments; the maintaining due order in the church, and due execution of the laws of Christ.*

Mal.

* As some official power and authority, is of divine appointment, to continue in the church, till the whole be perfected; so there must of necessity be a succession of persons qualified for it and invested with it;—But which succession, as to what is essential to it, appears to me to depend entirely upon the presence of Christ; the gifts and graces of his Spirit; and the force of his laws, always continued in the church; and such an orderly exercise of the power he has given it, for the appointment and constitution of such qualified persons, as its condition and circumstances will admit; and which is as real and effectual in every *particular* church, as in the *whole* body, as to the ends of their *particular* edification, *Ephes.* iv. 11, 16. And therefore as to the *popish* notion of an uninterrupted *personal* formal conveyance of that power, from one *officer* to another, in succession from the apostles, it has no foundation as I can find in scripture, or the nature and reason of the constitution of a

Mal. ii. 7. *The priests lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his*

christian church; and is attended with such darkness, and *absolute uncertainty*, as is quite inconsistent with the ends of the appointment, and the faith and hope of the people of God.

2. Nothing can be more evident, than that in every church rightly constituted, there must be (under Christ) some one at least, appointed to *rule*, consequently the rest must be *ruled*.—The *rulers* are such by office—to them pertains the regular *execution ONLY* of the laws of Christ.—And so far as their administration agrees with the word of God, the rest are bound to obey, *Heb. xiii. 17*.—Though not to the prejudice of the rights of conscience and private judgment.—For, no church officer has any absolute legislative or *imposing* power given him by Christ. See prop. i. note 4. prop. vii. sect. 1. note 1. and elsewhere.

3. It is to be wished, that those churches, who allow themselves to continue long without a *settled ministry* amongst them, would seriously consider, how clearly the scriptures, cited under this proposition, not only point out its utility and importance, but prove it a *divine institu-*

his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Prov. xxix. 18. Where there is no vision the people perish. Rom. x. 14. How shall they hear without a preacher? Ephes. iv. 11, 12. He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry. 1 Cor. xii. 28. And God hath set in the church first apostles—secondarily prophets—thirdly teachers, helps,

tion; with which it must be very wrong and dangerous to trifle.—For though they may have occasional supplies, yet they have no right to expect the like measure of the divine presence and blessing from them, as from a settled ministry; nor indeed any blessing at all, if they use the former to the sinful neglect of the latter.—And how often is it found that hearing a variety begets confusion and discord; or at least a weak fondness for novelty, and a vague and unsteady conduct in religion? which renders their future settlement more difficult, and hazardous; keeps the well disposed from their communion, and so every way weakens their interest and hastens their ruin.

helps, governments. - Acts vi. 3. *Men whom we may appoint over this business [of serving tables.]* Tit. i. 5. *That thou shouldest ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee.* 2 Tim. ii. 2. *The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able also to teach others.*

IV. That every particular church has a right of chusing their own officers.*

Acts

* 1. If the people have the power of election, in the less important office of a *deacon*, wherein their *temporal interest* is the principal concern, much more in that of a *bishop, elder, or pastor*, which so nearly affects their spiritual and eternal interest.—And if the *inspired apostles* paid this regard to the natural rights and liberties of the people, one would think there was still more reason for us to do so. From Acts xi. 22. and 2 Cor. viii. 19, 23. it also appears that the people chose *extraordinary ministers*, who therefore were called the *apostles of the churches* (for so the word *αποστολοι* might have been rendered.) And indeed even Matthias was elected to the

54 *Officers of a church, who choose.* Chap. 3.

Acts xiv. 23. *And when they had ordained them* (χειροτονησαντες, i. e. appointing with

apostolic office by the suffrage of the people, Acts i. 16, 23. See Cyp. ep. 67. Bp. Oxf. ed.

2. The word (χειροτονειω) amongst the Greeks, often, though not always, denotes a popular choice to office, or some particular service. So 2 Cor. viii. 19. χειροτονηθεις απο των εκκλησιων, i. e. chosen of the churches. So Demost. 1 Phil. εις εκκλησιαις εις δημοι χειροτονησαντες αυτον, i. e. neither the senate nor the people choosing him. St. Ignat. ep. ad Philad. says, περιποιεν εγω υμιν, ως εκκλησια θεου, χειροτονησιν διακονον εις το υπηρεειν ουκ εις διακονειν, i. e. It becomes you, as a church of God, to choose a minister to perform divine service there (at Antioch.) And thus the word χειροτονειω, Acts xiv. 23. Though it is properly rendered *ordained*, as more particularly respecting the act of Barnabas and Saul; yet it may also include the choice and consent of the people.

3. Even St. Cyprian, who lived in the middle of the third century, and had no mean opinion of the power of the clergy, speaks in the plainest terms of the people's power in the elections of their bishops, Ep. 68. Sect. 1. of the Bp. of Oxford's edit. — *Episcopo de Dei judicio, &c*

with the suffrage of the people) *elders* in every church. Acts vi. 3, 5. *Brethren, look ye out from amongst you seven men of honest report.—And the saying pleased the multitude, and they chose Stephen, &c.*

V. That the ordinary officers of a church are (at least) *bishops* (sometimes called *pastors* and *elders*) and *deacons*.*

1 Tim.

cleri & plebis suffragio ordinato, i. e. Ordained bishop by the will of God, and the suffrage of the clergy, and the people. Ep. 38. sect. 1. In ordinationibus clericis, fratres carissimi, solemus vos ante consulere, i. e. In our ministerial ordinations, we used, dear brethren, first to consult you. See also Ep. 67. sect. 2. Besides, to what purpose are churches exhorted to beware of and reject false teachers, if they have no power of choice. See Dr. Whitby on 2 Cor. ii. 6.

* As to the *teachers* mentioned Ephes. iv. 10. See also Rom. xii. 7. whether they were the same with the *pastors*, or of a different order, and if so wherein the difference lies, is hard to determine; but I rather think the apostle intends either the *tutors* and *catechists* in private

56 *Who are the officers of a church. Chap. 3.*

1 Tim. iii. 1, 10. *The office of a bishop*
—*of a deacon.* Phil. i. 1. *To the saints at*
Philippi,

Schools, or else the mere *preachers* of the word, or perhaps both : but neither of which had any *pastoral*, or *ruling* power or authority, in any particular church as such, but were ministers to the church at large.

2. As to *ruling elders*, not *pastors* or *ministers* of the word, it appears to me doubtful whether they are necessary by divine appointment, at least to all churches; for, we find the word *elder* and *bishop* (or *overseer*) used promiscuously to denote one and the same office in several places, as Acts xx. 17. They who are called *elders*, are verse 28, called *overseers* (or *bishops*.) So Tit. i. 5, 6. compared with 1 Pet. i. 2. (where *ἐπισκοπῆς* refers to the *episcopal* office.) And the epistle to the *Philippians*, is addressed to the *saints* there, with the *bishops* and *deacons*, without any mention of *elders*. The like may be observed, in the apostle's direction to Timothy about church officers; and it is evident that there are many churches that have no occasion for such an *office*, as distinct from that of the *pastoral*. Yet on the other hand it may be urged, that in the nature of things, there seems

Chap. 3. *Who are the officers of a church.* 57

Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.

Acts xx. 17. *He called the elders of the*
F *church,*

to be as *real* an occasion for *such* an office in the larger churches, to assist the pastor in government, as that of *deacons*, to assist him in the care of the poor. And we read of *helps-governments*—as distinct from *pastors* and *teachers*, 1 Cor. xii. 28. Rom. xii. 7, 8. *Elders* also are mentioned Acts xv. 2. 4. 6. 22. as concerned with the apostles in managing the affairs of the church. And 1 Tim. v. 12. will bear an interpretation to the same purpose. Though after all, I must confess it is my present opinion that the office of a *mere ruling elder*, has no certain foundation in scripture.—And as to an *episcopal order*, or jurisdiction, *superior* to that of *pastoral elders*, I cannot find any thing like it in the *scripture account* of the matter. Acts xx. 17. 28. 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. Phil. i. 1. are, to me, demonstrations to the contrary. See also Dr. *Whitby's* notes on those texts. And I may here add, that *Clemens Rom.* speaks of *bishops* and *elders*, as one and the same sort of persons, and of the same office and order. For in the first *Ep. ad. Cor.* chap. 42. speaking of the ordination of church officers, he mentions only *bishops* and *deacons*,

58 *Who are the officers of a church. Chap. 3.*

church, and said to them—Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you

καθιστανοντας αρχοντας αυτων—εις επισκοπους κ' Διακονους, i. e. *They (i. e. the apostles) ordained the first fruits of their ministry, for bishops and deacons, whom, chap. 57. he calls elders, υπολαγνη τοις πρεσβυτεροις, i. e. Be ye subject to the presbyters or elders. And chap. 1. of that epist. υποτασσομενοι τοις ηγουμενοις υμων. Be ye subject to those who have the rule over you. Like that of the apostle Heb. xiii. 7. 17. which seems to imply, they had more rulers in their church than one, and that they were what he elsewhere calls bishops and elders. And chap. 54. he speaks of presbyters set over the flock of Christ—το ποιμνιον—μετα των καθεσταμενων πρεσβυτερων—It must be acknowledged indeed that St Ignatius, who lived in the apostolick times, and presided in the church of Antioch, mentions bishops and elders as distinct. Epist. ad. Ephes. chap. 2. υποτασσομενοι επισκοπω κ' πρεσβυτερω, i. e. Be subject to the bishops and presbytery--And chap. 4. πρεσβυτεριον—ετος συντημοσαι τω επισκοπω, ως χορδαι κιθαρα, i. e. the presbytery so fitted to the bishops, as the strings to the harp.—The like he says in many other places,—But even*

you overseers (or bishops) and feed the church. 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. *The elders I ex-*

F 2

hort

from him we cannot learn, of a *certainty*, any more than that some of the larger churches (such as Ephesus) had several presbyters or bishops.—That one of them usually presided, and was therefore called, by way of distinction, the BISHOP, (and sometimes *ἐπίσκοπος*, *præses*, *president*, vid. Just. Mart. Apol. 2. p. 97.—) But that the other presbyters might be still his equals, as to order and office, and his *colleagues* or *joint pastors* and elders of the church with him (called *ἐπίσκοποι*, 1 Thes. v. 12.) And that this *bishop* and his *presbyters* had the care and charge but of *one christian society*, who usually met in *one place* of public worship, and received the Lord's Supper at one table. Vid. his *Ep. ad. Philiad.* chap. 3. &c. &c. Or these elders might be mere ruling elders not pastors.

And it may be farther observed,

3. That the first mention we have of *elders* in the Christian church, is Acts xi. 30. who (as those mentioned Acts xv. 4.) might not be so entitled from any special office they had in the church, but from their *age*, or as to some of them, *because* of their being *witnesses* chosen by

60 *Who are the officers of a church.* Chap. 3.

hort—Feed the flock of God—taking the oversight thereof (ἐπισκοπῆς) willingly.

Tit.

Christ, to see and testify his sufferings and glory, 2 Pet. v. 1. And as to others of them, because of their being the *first fruits* of the gospel-ministry, and therefore of special estimation in the church, as is intimated 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. These elders, under the apostles and evangelists, and in their absence, would naturally have the affairs of the churches to which they belonged, submitted to their management and care, until some more particular regulations could be thought on, and particular officers appointed, such as *bishops* and *deacons*; and who would naturally be chosen from amongst these elders—which agrees with what the apostle hints, 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. and with what *Clement* declares, 1 *Ep. ad Cor.* chap 42. before quoted. So that it is by some very much questioned whether, in the apostolick times, there were any ordained to be *elders*, or invested with any office under that name. It is said indeed, Acts xiv. 23. that the apostles ordained *elders*.—But then it may be understood of those who were *elders* before, in the sense above; whom they ordained to be *bishops* or *deacons*;

Tit. i. 5, 6, 7. *Ordain elders—if any be blameless—for a bishop must be blameless.*

F 3

VI.

the case required. So Tit. i. 5, 6. is explained. 1 Tim. iii. 1. 6. and chap. v. 17. See Dr. Benson's *essay on the settlement of the primitive churches*, part. 1. To the perusal of which I (principally) owe this note. But I acknowledge it is doubtful what these *elders* so often mentioned were. Whether joint pastors, or merely preaching or ruling assistants to the *pastor* or *bishop*. Every *bishop* was an *elder*, though every *elder* was not a *bishop*. We read of presidents *πρεσβυτεροι*, 1 Thes. v. 12. but these presidents are said to be presbyters or *elders*, 1 Tim. v. 17.

4. I will here add a note, which should have been introduced a little before, viz. that (it appears to me) the original of all official power in the church is in Christ the *supreme head*, and only *law-giver* to it.—That some *special* particular *qualifications*, (besides common natural or acquired abilities and grace) are necessary to all such power in the church.—That a regular call and appointment to office is also necessary to the orderly and authoritative exercise of those qualifications, to the edification of the church,

VI. The officers of a church should be qualified for—called and appointed unto—and signify their willing acceptance of their office, before they enter upon the exercise of it.

1. They are to be duly qualified for their office.

1 Tim. i. 7. *The apostle condemns some, for desiring to be teachers—understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Psal. l. 16. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare*

which is the end of their being bestowed, Ephes. iv. 11, 12. That Christ himself will take care to bestow those qualifications as long as he has a church in the world, more or less, as he sees proper. And that the outward call, or choice of qualified persons, he has left to his church, and their investiture, to pastors or elders. This note contains the sum and substance of all I have said concerning the nature, derivation, succession and use of ecclesiastical power in the church and its officers.

declare my statutes? 1 Tim. v. 22. *Lay hands suddenly on no man.*

The qualification of a bishop or elder.

1 Tim. iii. 2, 8. Tit. i. 6, 9. *A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife * just, holy, temperate, vigilant, sober,*

F 4

well

* *The husband of one wife*, i. e. neither guilty of *polygamy* (i. e. having several wives at once) nor of *divorce*, or the taking a second wife before the death of the first; evils too common in those times, both with Jews and Gentiles; and however borne with before the establishment of Christianity, were nevertheless *sins* against the divine institution of marriage; and therefore *eminently* culpable, and scandalous, in a person who claimed so *sacred* and *exemplary* a character, as that of a *bishop* or *president* of a Christian church. And as this is so natural and easy an interpretation of the words, supported by critics and expositors of the greatest abilities, it is surprising that such ingenious and learned writers as *Whiston*, *Hallett*, and *others*, should conclude from hence, that the apostle made the marrying a second wife, after the death of the

well behaved, hospitable, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, patient, not a brawler, not soon angry, not self-willed, not greedy of filthy lucre, or covetous; but one that ruleth well his own house;—having faithful children in subjection; and not accused of riot or unruly; not a novice, [in religion, or a new convert] having a good report of those without (i. e. the world) a lover of good, [men] holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince gainsayers.

The

first, inconsistent with the character and office of a Christian bishop; especially as the apostle elsewhere allows of second marriages, Rom. vii. 2. 1 Cor. vii. 8, 9, 17, 27, 28, 29. And there may be as many just and good reasons for a second marriage as for the first. See Drs. Doddridge and Benson on the place. Dr. Dodwell says,—The apostle means, that a bishop should be one who in the time of his heathenism—never at any time had more than one wife.—
Consecration Sermon, Bp. St. David's, Nov. 30, 1766.

The qualifications of a deacon.

1. Tim. iii. 8, 12. *The deacons must be grave, not double tongued [διδόρυς, i. e. deceitful, saying and unsaying] not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding fast the mystery of faith in a pure conscience; and let these also first be proved, and then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless—even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things; let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. Acts vi. 3. Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.*

2. They are to be * called to their work, by the grace and providence of God, and

* 1st. In what follows, the reader will easily distinguish what is applicable to the *pastor*, what to the *deacon*, and what to both in common.

2. In order to a *regular call* to the ministry, there should be a due measure of those gifts and graces, Christ has prescribed, and bestows, as

and the election and approbation of the church.

Heb. v. 4. *No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.* Rom. x. 15.—*And how shall they preach except they be sent?* Acts vi. 3, 5. *Look ye out seven men;—and they chose Stephen, &c.* 2 Tim. ii. 2. *What things thou hast heard the same commit to faithful men, who shall teach others.*

3. They

qualifications for it; a sincere and voluntary inclination, and self-dedication to it; those qualifications, and that inclination, should be examined and approved by competent judges; and the candidate recommended to God, and his blessing, by solemn prayer,—which perhaps may be all that is necessary to the public preaching of the word;—but a farther trial, and more particular appointment must I think be generally necessary to the regular assuming and executing the pastoral office, if we would do all things *decently*, and in *order*, to the due *edification* of the church, the credit of religion, and the proper support of the ministerial character, and influence.

3. They are to accept of their charge, not from worldly views, but of a sincere and willing mind.

1 Pet. v. 2. Taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

4. * They are to be ordained, or solemnly set apart and appointed to their work, (usually) † by the assistance of other officers, of chief power and authority in the churches.

Rom.

* See article 23 of the church of England.

† 1st. I say *usually* because I think it evident from the nature of things; that though *mere popular* ordinations are not so regular and agreeable to the apostolic practice, yet may perhaps, upon extraordinary occasions at least, be allowed as *valid*; for what is done in this case, and in such circumstances, with an upright heart, and intention, according to the general rules of the gospel, we have reason to conclude will be attended with a divine blessing, and answer the *chief* ends of the christian ministry:—but I speak thus cautiously and with so many restrictions in favour of mere popular ordinations, because I apprehend too great an indulgence here,

Rom. x. 15. *How shall they preach except they be sent?* Tit. i. 5. *I left thee in Crete that thou shouldest ordain elders in every city.*

Acts vi.

would open the way for bold and forward men, to thrust themselves unqualify'd into the christian ministry; the consequence of which, must be the destruction of all public order in the church, and the bringing the public worship of God into contempt, as we see amongst the fanatics of the present day.

2d. Though it should be granted that a *regular* authority to preach the word, and the right of exercising the pastoral office, may not depend upon a *popular choice*, but rather be derived (as to the form, and so far as man is concerned in it) from those possessed of office authority in the church.—Yet whether any person so appointed, shall exercise his office in and over any particular society, must, surely, of *right* depend upon the consent and approbation of that society. See chap. iii. prop. i. Note 4. prop. iv. and prop. vi. and notes there. Prop. vii. sect. iv. prop. viii. and texts there.

But still, whatever right the people have of *choice* in this case; it appears to me the proper province of the *bishops, pastors, or elders* to or-

Acts vi. 6. *Whom (i. e. the deacons) they (i. e. the people) set before the apostles—and when they (the apostles) had prayed they laid their*

dain, i. e. formally to appoint and set apart to the orderly exercise of any office in the church:—because we have no one instance in the scripture as I can find, of a MERE POPULAR ORDINATION; but all by officers of proper authority. So Acts xiv. 23. It was not the people, but Paul and Barnabas that ordained, though by the suffrage, and with the approbation of the people. Acts vi. 3, 6. The apostles claim this work as their prerogative, after the people's choice,—whom we may appoint.—Whom therefore the church set before them, and they laid their hands on them, as a token of this appointment. And Tit. i. 5. The apostle says, I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain (καταστήσεις, i. e. appoint, constitute) elders in every city.—What occasion for this, if the people had the power of ordination or appointment of their elders? and if they had no such power then, I cannot see how they can*

* This sense of the word *καταστήσειν* the reader may see vindicated at large, *Stennet's Works*, vol. 1. page 116, 120.

their hands on them. Acts xiv. 23. And when they (Barnabas and Paul) had ordained

have it now.—So 2 Tim. ii. 2. The apostle charges Timothy *what things thou hast heard of me, commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others.*—See also Acts xiii. 2, 3. Where the prophets and teachers of the church of Antioch were the ordainers. Agreeable to this, Clemens. *epif. ad Cor.* chap. xlv. Says, the *bishops and deacons were constituted*: συνευδοκησας ἐκκλησιας; πασης:—i. e. the whole church consenting:—that is, they were appointed to their office, by other officers, the church concurring therein.—And by keeping to this primitive pattern, the rights and privileges of the people, and the authority and dignity of the ministerial office, are both justly preserved.—

3. As to *imposition of hands* in ordination, it seems to be at least, a very convenient and proper rite upon such occasions; and as far as I can find constantly used in the primitive church;—as *lifting up* the hands in prayer, is a natural sign of fervent desire, and expectation of a blessing from heaven; so *laying* the hands upon the person prayed for, as naturally denotes the earnest desire and hope of his *special share* in that

ed (with the suffrage of the people) elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.

VII. The

blessing, or that it may be conferred upon him. It is also a very fit sign or token, of special appointment and designation to any particular business, office, or service:—thus the witnesses layed their hands on the blasphemer, in token of his being justly devoted to death. *Lev. xxiv. 14.* thus the people of Israel (that is their representatives) laid their hands on the *Levites*, in token of their separation to divine service. *Numb. viii. 9, 10.* And thus *Joshua* was separated to the office of commander in chief over Israel, in the room of *Moses*. *Numb. xxvii. 18, 23.* And in the New Testament, we find the *deacons* ordained by laying on of hands. *Acts vi. 5, 6.* And that *Barnabas* and *Saul*, were separated to particular occasional service, this way. *Acts xiii. 2, 3.* It is objected that “as the use of this rite in the primitive times, was accompanied with extraordinary gifts of the spirit, those gifts being now ceased, the rite ought to cease also, as being a mere empty unmeaning ceremony.” But it should be observed, that this rite was often used, where no

VII. The officers of a church have their re-

extraordinary gifts in consequence are mentioned.

—As in all the places before quoted, except perhaps in the case of *Joshua*, and even of him it is said in him was the spirit, before *Moses* laid his hands on him. And of the *deacons* it is said, before their ordination, they were men full of the *Holy Ghost*; nor do we find any new gifts imparted to them by laying on of hands: the like may be observed of *Barnabas* and *Saul*. *Acts* xiii. 3. So that it appears plain to me, that the chief design of this practice was, to signify a solemn separation to some particular office, or work, and as such, properly continued in the church, even to this day, as, if not essential to the validity, yet to the clearness, solemnity and regularity of an ordination.

4. It may possibly be objected, “ that what
“ I have alledged, and taken for proof against
“ mere popular ordinations, will carry me into
“ another extream, and prove the sole right of
“ diocesan prelates to that work; seeing the or-
“ dainers here referred to, were not presbyters but
“ apostles, or evangelists, or (as *Acts* xiii. 3.) pro-
“ phets, who were of a superior order.”

respective work, and duty, which they are to
 G attend

To which I would answer, (1st) That it was absolutely necessary that such *extraordinary* or *superior officers*, as *apostles*, &c. should be the ordainers, until there were others appointed in the church; or else there could have been no ordinations at all (unless by the people, which I have proved was not the case) and therefore, nothing can be fairly inferred from that circumstance, in favour of the objection.

2. That the sacred history closed, before we could well have much account of ordinations, by the *ordinary* or *inferior officers*.—Yet we have one instance to that purpose; 1 *Tim.* iv. 14. Where *presbyters* are expressly mentioned, as concerned in the appointment of *Timothy*, to some extraordinary service.

3. That we do not find the apostles, or evangelists, ordained any *higher* order of officers to succeed them in the church as officers, than the *presbyters*, *pastors*, or *bishops* of single congregations; and consequently such *presbyters*, *pastors*, or *bishops*, must succeed them in the power of ordination, if it is not in the people; i. e. If the power of ordination was annexed to any office in the church, it must be to such officers, as

attend with serious care, diligence, and fidelity.

1 Pet.

the *elders* or *bishops* of *single* congregations, because it does not appear, there was any *higher* order or office appointed by the apostles. So that the *sole* power claimed by a *Diocesan prelate* in this case, as a *superior* officer in the church, does not follow, as the objection supposes, from the *mere scriptural* account of the matter as I can perceive: how far other arguments may conduce to prove that point, I cannot stay here to enquire. I acknowledge that, as to the government of the church, not only the apostles, but also the evangelists, such as *Timothy* and *Titus* did exercise a ruling power over several churches and their pastors, which is pleaded in favour of the *present* Diocesan form amongst us, as in *itself* not antichristian and therefore allowable, and even necessary in some states of the church. But whether the state of the church *now* requires such a mode of government—and whether *our present* Diocesan episcopacy answers to the pure scriptural idea of such extraordinary jurisdiction, are questions to be considered, at least, as *very doubtful*. The maintaining the purity of faith and worship, and the liberty wherewith Christ

1 Pet. iv. 11. *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man mi-*

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nister,

hath made us free, should be the end of all ecclesiastical government. But the present mode of Diocesan episcopacy amongst us, does not appear, to an unprejudiced mind, very well calculated to answer that end. The spiritual courts as they are *now* managed have certainly a tendency the very reverse, and are therefore the grief of many wise and good men in the church of England. *A mere spiritual superintendent* might, perhaps, in some cases be of use; but a *Lord bishop* with his lay chancellors is quite another thing, and very foreign from the idea of a bishop in the primitive church.

I acknowledge that *Ignatius* in some of the epistles ascribed to him, speaks much of the entire subjection of the presbyters and deacons, as well as the people to the bishop. But this does not come up to our present Diocesan episcopacy; and it must be acknowledged that the air of *Ignatius's* stile, good man as he was, is not like that of the apostles, but far more assuming.—Nor ought there to be any such intirely passive and implicate obedience paid to the dictates of any Christian bishop, not divinely inspired, as

nister, let him do it as of the ability God giveth. Rom. xii. 6, 8. Having gifts differing according to the grace given us; whether prophesy [i. e. teaching by infallible inspiration] * let us prophesy,—or ministry, let

this pious father contends for in many places. See Dr. Whitby's pref. to ep. to Titus, and Stillingfleet's Iren. p. 385.

* To prophesy, with us commonly signifies to foretel things to come; and so sometimes in the scripture; but there it generally denotes a speaking by immediate infallible inspiration; or a declaration of the mind of God, under the extraordinary teachings or influence of his spirit. 2 Pet. i. 19, 21. 2 Tim. iii. 16. This gift, tho' long withheld from the church, before the coming of Christ in the flesh, was afterwards restored, as highly necessary for the confirmation and furtherance of the gospel; as appears from Acts xiv. 3. chap. xix. 6. 1 Cor. xiii. 2. It may sometimes denote singing the praises of God, as Dr. Lightfoot and others justly observe from 1 Sam. x. 5—10. 2 Chron. xxv. 1, 2, 3. 1 Cor. xi. 5. chap. xiv. 5. 15. Yet perhaps the singing in this case, is to be understood, only of that which was extraordinary, or of such divine

let us wait on our ministry.—He that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that ruleth with diligence.

More particularly,

1st. Of the duty of bishops, elders or pastors.

G 3

(I.) They

songs, &c. as were then dictated by the immediate infallible inspiration of the spirit, and not of ordinary singing such psalms or hymns as were before composed.—To *prophecy*, also sometimes denotes the *preaching* or publishing the word of God, by way of exhortation and doctrine. 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 29, 31. Acts xv. 32.—But then not ordinary but extraordinary preaching is intended; or *preaching* by immediate and infallible inspiration, and not by study. 1 Cor. xiv. 30, 31. chap. xiii. 2. Acts xiii. 1. See also the distinction made, 1 Cor. xii. 28. Lord Barrington, in his *miscell. sacr.* vol. i. Thinks the interpretation of tongues, the discernment of spirits, and praying by the spirit, as it is called Jude 19, 20.—1 Cor. xiv. 14, 15. included in *prophecy*. Upon the whole, so far as I can find, whether *prophecy*, means *praying*, *singing*, *teaching* or *exhorting*, or the like, it always carries in it the idea of im-

(I.) They are to give themselves to the study and preaching of the word, administration of the sacraments, and prayers for and with the people.

1st. To the study and preaching of the word.*

2 Tim.

mediate infallible inspiration, or some *extraordinary* influence of the spirit, as well as when it denotes the *predicting* future events; and therefore distinguishes those acts from what is common and ordinary in them. Tho' perhaps the rehearsal of divinely inspired songs may be understood by prophesying. See 2. Chron. xxv. 1, 2, 3, &c.

* As *preaching* is, properly, publishing, or proclaiming, it includes in it, I apprehend, not only *sermonizing*, and *expounding*, but even *reading the scriptures* to the people.—For that it is a part of the ministerial office to read the scriptures to the people, may be concluded from Deut. xxxi. 9, 12. Nehem. viii. 1, 2, 5. Luke iv. 16. (Isa. lxvi. 21. Mat. xxiii. 34.) Acts xiii. 15, 27. Col. iv. 16. 1 Cor. xiv. 37. 1 Thes. xv. 27. 2 Thes. iii. 14. *Catechizing* may also be included in teaching (Heb. v. 12) as being one way of teaching the principles of the christian religion,

2 Tim. ii. 4. *No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.*

1 Tim. iv. 13, 15. *Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine, meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them,*

2 Tim. iv. 2. *Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season,—reprove.—rebuke—exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.*

2 Tim. ii. 15. *Study to shew thyself a workman, that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* 1 Tim. v. 17.

The elders that labour in the word and doctrine. Acts vi. 4. *And we will give our-*

selves continually to—the ministry of the word.—Mat. xxviii. 19. Go teach all na-

tions.—Mark xvi. 15.—1 Tim. iii. 2.—A bishop must be apt to teach.

2. Administration of sacraments.

G 4 Mat. xxviii.

and perhaps the most effectual for securing and promoting regular knowledge, and a solid judgment in divine things; though now too much neglected.

Mat. xxviii. 19.—*Baptizing them in the name of the Father, &c.*

1 Cor. x. 16.—*The cup we bless,—the bread we break.*—1 Cor. iv. 1.—*Us, stewards of the mysteries of God.*

3. Prayers for, and with the people publicly.

Acts vi. 4. *And we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word.* Acts xx. 36.—*He kneeled down and prayed with them all.* Col. i. 9. *We don't cease to pray for you.*

(II.) They are to preside, watch over, rule and * feed, the flock of Christ, with spiritual food.

1 Thes.

* 1. Though the principal part of this feeding of the flock, is doubtless included in preaching, —yet private instructions, and exhortations are included also.

2. To *preside* is to sit as chief, guide, director and moderator in the affairs of the church.

3. As to *ruling*, it consists, I apprehend, not in a power of making new laws, but in an orderly and right execution of those already made by

1 Thes. v. 12. *Them that are over you in the Lord.* 1 Tim. v. 17. *The elders that rule well.* Heb. xiii. 17. *Them that have the rule over you, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.—* Acts xx. 28. *Take heed to the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the flock of God.—* 1 Pet. v. 2. *Feed the flock.—* Jer. iii. 15.—*Feed you with knowledge and understanding.—See also Ezek. xxxiv. 4.*

(III.) They are to set a holy example to the people, in all things.

Tit. ii. 7. *In all things shew thyself a pattern of good works.* 1 Tim. iv. 12. *Be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* 1 Pet. v. 3. *Being examples to the flock.*

(IV.) They

Christ himself, the sole law-giver in his church; and thus the obedience paid to pastors, is not a blind, implicit, absolute submission to their dictates; but a rational, reverent, conscientious regard to the laws of Christ, by them duly ex-

(IV.) They are to bless the people in the name of the Lord.*

1 Cor. xiv. 16. *Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he which occupieth the room of the unlearned say amen?* Numb. vi. 6. 23. *Ye priests shall bless the children of Israel.—ver. 27. Shall put my name upon (them) and I will bless them.* Deut. x. 8. —*The Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bless in his name.—2 Cor. xiii. 14. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with with you all. Amen.*

(V.) They

plained, inculcated, and addressed to the heart. See chap. iii. prop. i. note 5. and prop. viii. chap. iv. prop. iii. sect. 5. note there. The whole of the episcopal government is denoted by two words, 1 Tim. iii. 5. *προσῆναι* and *ἐπιμελεσθῆναι*, to superintend and take care of the church, as a father does his family or household.

* By blessing here I do not mean any power or authority actually to impart any special favour from God; but to pray and plead with God for it; considering such prayer as the medium of conveying it, if it pleased him.

(V.) They are to visit, and pray with the sick in private, when desired; upon which a divine blessing is promised.

James v. 14. *Is any sick? let him send for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him.—ver. 15. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick.**

(VI.) They are to assist the churches in the ordination of their officers, and administration of all divine ordinances, when occasionally and properly called thereunto.

Acts xiv. 23. *And when they (Paul and Barnabas) had ordained (with the people's suffrage)*

* If by *faith* here, we understand the common faith of christians, we must not suppose the sick person should be always restored and preserved from death, by the prayers of the elders, for that would have been contrary to the divine appointment, and matter of fact;—but the meaning is, that in this way of humble and fervent prayer, with a believing hope and trust in the mercy of God, a suitable blessing might be expected, and the affliction either removed or sanctified; as best answered the ends of infinite wis-

suffrage) elders in every church.—Acts vi. 3. Men whom we (apostles) may appoint. Tit. i. 5. For this cause left I thee (Titus) in Crete, that thou shouldst ordain elders in every city.—See chap. iii. prop. vi. sect. iv. and note there.

2dly. Of the duty of Deacons.

(I.) It appertains to the deacons to take the care and management of the *secular* * affairs
of

dom and goodness, as concerned in the government of the world in general, and the propagation of the gospel in particular.—Though I rather think by *faith* here, we must understand the faith of miracles ; *i. e.* a *particular*, and *extraordinary perswasion* of, and trust in, the miraculous power of God. A faith peculiar to those times, and produced by some special extraordinary impulse of the divine spirit.—See Mat. xvii. 20. chap. xxi. 21. Mark xi. 22. Acts iii. 16. 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

* The care of the poor originally and primarily, belonged to the elder or bishop,—as appears from Acts xi. 30. Acts iv. 37. Acts vi. 2, 4.—1 Cor. xvi. 1. 3.

of the church, that the bishop or pastor may be more at leisure to attend the spiritual.

Acts vi. 2, 3, 4. *Then the twelve said— it is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables,—Look ye out men whom we may appoint over this business, —but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word.*

(II.) Thus of course it belongs to the deacons, to provide fit materials for the decent administration of baptism, and the supper of the Lord; that the apostles rule might be kept.†

1 Cor.

† It is generally allowed by enquirers into these subjects, that in the primitive church there were *deaconesses*; i. e. pious women, whose particular business it was to assist in the entertainment and care of the itinerant preachers; visit the sick and imprisoned, instruct female catechumens, and assist at their baptism; then more particularly necessary from the peculiar customs of those countries, the persecuted state of the church, and the speedier spreading of the gospel. —Such a one it is reasonable to think *Phebe* was,

1 Cor. xiv. 40.—*Let all things be done decently and in order.*

(III.) They are to acquaint themselves, as exactly as possible, with the necessities of the poor, and supply them according to the church's ability.

Acts

mentioned Rom. xvi. 1. Who is expressly called (*Διακονον*) a *deaconess*, or *stated servant*, as Dr. Doddridge renders it.—They were usually widows, and to prevent scandal, generally in years, 1 Tim. v. 9. See also *Spanhem. hist. Christ. Secul.* i. page 554.—The apostolic constitutions (as they are called) mention the ordination of a *deaconess*, and the form of prayer used on that occasion; lib. viii. chap. 19, 20.—*Pliny* also in his celebrated epistle (xcvii) to *Trajan*, is thought to refer to them, when speaking of two female christians, whom he put to the torture, he says, *quæ ministræ dicebantur*; i. e. who were called *deaconesses*.—But as the primitive christians seem to be led to this practice, from the *peculiarity* of their circumstances; and the scripture is intirely silent, as to any appointment to this supposed office, or any rules about it, it is I think very justly laid aside, at least as an office.

Acts iv. 35. And distribution was made to every man, according as he had need. xi. 29, 30. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren in Judea; which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.—Compare Acts vi. 1, &c.

N. B. To the elders, as principals, the deacons being their assistants in this case.

(IV.) They are to supply the bishops, elders, or pastors seasonably, with what is allotted by the church for their support.*

1 Cor.

* 1. It follows, that the deacons are to receive the contributions of the church, in charge for the purposes above-mentioned; and that they are accountable to the church for their management.

2. That it must pertain to their office to admonish, reprove, and bring to the cognizance of the church, such as neglect their duty in contribution. And

3. That they should visit the poor, and acquaint themselves with their necessities, as fully as possible.

1 Cor. ix. 14. *Even so hath the Lord ordained that they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel.* 2 Tim. 2. 4. *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.*

VIII. Though the officers of a particular church are, as such, the only *proper* regular executors of its power and authority, yet they cannot rightfully exercise their office therein, without the knowledge and consent of the church; nor have they any compulsory power over the consciences of any, or authority to decide in matters of faith, tho' united in a general council.†

Gal.

† 1. The reason is—numbers cannot make *fallible* men *infallible*—nor can those who are themselves *fallible*, have authority to *decide* in matters of conscience; of which the word of God is the only guide to both ministers and people, since extraordinary inspiration has ceased. And for this reason, on the other hand, no particular church (or body of men) has a power over the conscience of its minister.

2. Though the minister of a *particular church* is under some peculiar obligations to instruct

Gal. i. 8. *But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached—let him be accursed.* 2 Cor. i. 24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith.* 1 Pet. v. 3. *Neither as being lords over God's heritage.* 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. *When ye (the church) are gathered together—to deliver such a one to satan—which* 2 Cor. ii. 6. *Is called therefore, the reproof of many.* Acts. xv. 22. *Then*

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it

and guide them; yet, as he is a minister of the church in general, (so far as is consistent with his duty to that *particular church*) he may occasionally preach and administer the sacraments, and assist at ordinations elsewhere;—And may even remove to any other congregation, when he believes in his conscience he has a call of providence so to do, though not upon every trifling occasion;—and that without re-ordination, of which there are no instances in scripture as I can find, and for which there is no countenance from reason:—Though upon such new settlement, the setting apart some time for solemn prayer, imploring the divine blessing, is doubtless very expedient.

90 *Qualifications of church members.* Chap. 3.

it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church. 3 John 9. But Diotrephes who loveth to have the preheminance receiveth us not.

IX. Every particular church hath a right within itself, of judging of the fitness and qualifications * of its members; i. e. of accepting

3. As every minister of Christ, properly receives his office from Christ himself, at least as to the essentials of it; so he cannot be, *ipso facto*, deprived of it by mere human authority: though by being guilty of such errors in doctrine, or immoralities in practice, as are inconsistent with it, he may forfeit it, and indeed really divest himself of it; and in that case may, and ought to be prohibited the exercise of it, by every Christian society where he may attempt it (they knowing his case) and for that purpose they have a right and power in themselves, as the guardians of the honour of Christ, and the purity of the faith and morality of his church.

* 1. These qualifications (which follow) are necessary to the Christian character in general,

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cepting or refusing such as offer themselves to its communion; and of continuing or sepa-

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rating

and descriptive of it, but more particularly applicable to church-members, as what they ought to be in some good measure, possessed of even before they take upon them that character in so public a manner.

2. As it is one principal end and design of the institution of gospel-churches, to secure and promote the purity and morality of the Christian religion, great care ought to be taken by them, to keep up a due discipline in admitting persons to communion with them, and continuing them in it; lest *holy things be given to dogs*; immoralities countenanced; and no difference made between the godly and the wicked: yet on the other hand, great tenderness is to be used towards the weak in faith, who appear upon the whole to be sincere believers in *Jesus Christ*, and desirous of living in obedience to his commands; that they may not be discouraged, or deprived of the means of their spiritual edification and comfort. The extream niceness and severity therefore of some churches in this matter, is rather to be *deplored* than *imitated*; who, to support the affectation of extraordinary holiness,

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rating from it, those that are already in it, provided they exercise that right only in a way agreeable to the express laws of Christ, and consistent with their own peace and edification; and that charity which they ought to cultivate with all the people of God.

Acts ix. 26. When Saul essayed to join himself to the disciples, they were afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

I. As to the qualifications of those that are to be received into communion.

1. They should appear to have some competent knowledge of the chief and distinguishing doctrines of the Christian religion.

Matt. xxviii. 19. Go teach all nations.

John vi. 45. They shall all be taught of

God. Heb. viii. 11. All know me from the

or the credit of their own inventions and peculiarities, too often make a voluntary *unscrupled* sacrifice of Christian charity, the rights and privileges of their Christian brethren, and the honour of religion itself. *See conclus.*

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the least to the greatest. 1 Cor. iv. 3. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. John xvii. 3. That they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

2. They should be acquainted, with the chief design of the rites and positive institutions of Christianity, and reverently use them, viz. *Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.*

Matt. xxviii. 19. Go teach all nations, baptizing them. Heb. x. 22. Having our bodies washed with pure water. Rom. vi.

4. We are buried with him by baptism into his death, that as Christ was raised from the dead, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Acts ii. 38. Be baptized for the remission of your sins. ver. 41. Then they that gladly received the word were baptized—and added to the church. 1 Pet. iii. 21. Baptism doth now save us (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience) by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Acts viii. 12. And when they believed—they were baptized.

Luke xxii. 19. *This do in remembrance of me.* 1 Cor. xi. 23, 29. *I received of the Lord that which I delivered unto you—as oft as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death until he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.*

3. They should appear to repent of, and forsake their sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, according to his gospel.

Mark i. 15. *Repent ye and believe the gospel.* Matt. iii. 6. *And were baptized in Jordan confessing their sins.* John iii. 36. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall*

* i. e. He that partakes of the Lord's Supper as a common meal, and not with a religious reverence, and particular regard to the death of Christ, is so guilty.

shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Acts xvii. 30. But now commandeth all men every where to repent. Acts v. 14. And believers were added to the Lord. Acts i. 47. To the church.

4. They should manifest a sincere and fervent love to the Lord Jesus Christ, as their Lord God and Redeemer, and worship him accordingly.

John xx. 28. And Thomas said unto him, My Lord and my God! John v. 23. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. 1 Pet. ii. 7. Unto you that believe, he is precious. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha. Rev. i. 5, 6. Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood—be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Psal. xlv. 11. Worship thou Him.

5. They should make some express declaration or confession of their faith and repentance, their hope in the promises, and sub-

jection to the authority of Christ, and the order and discipline of his church, according to his word.*

1. That

* It may be asked perhaps, to whom is this declaration of faith, repentance, &c. to be made, in order to give satisfaction to the church? I answer, as there is no particular direction given in this case by *Christ* in his word, it must be left to the judgment of every particular church to chuse their own way, so it be not inconsistent with any known rule of duty.— But, as to the candidates giving an account of their experiences in these matters, in a *minute and circumstantial* manner, before the *whole body*, which is the method in some churches, as it has no foundation in scripture (as I can find) is putting them upon an unnecessary piece of mortification,—hurts the modesty of the more diffident and humble,—gratifies the spiritual vanity and pride of such as value themselves upon their religious knowledge and attainments,—and is the occasion of preventing many worthy persons from the church-communion,—It seems to me not ALWAYS so eligible as their doing it to the pastor, and two or three others of the most solid and judicious amongst them, who may

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1. That they should make a declaration of faith, &c.

Matt. x. 32. *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father.*

make a report thereof to the church; liberty being also given, for any particular persons, to satisfy themselves, if they desire it, by private conference. [And I say NOT ALWAYS, because in *some cases* such a particular declaration of faith, and the gracious work of God, may be instructive and edifying to others and answer many valuable ends.] But the making such a public declaration, a *term* of communion, which it is very evident, the great Lawgiver has not made so, is carrying the matter beyond all reasonable and warrantable bounds, and not at all consistent with the liberty of the gospel. As to a more general profession of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour, a renunciation of the world, and devotion to the service of God; I see not but this may be made before all, not only the church but others, upon any proper occasion, and particularly upon such a one as taking up a public profession of religion. See the scriptures quoted under the proposition.

ther. Rom. x. 10. And with the mouth confession is made to salvation. 1 Pet. iii. 15. Be always ready to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. Acts xix. 18. And many of them that believed, came and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Acts viii. 38. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Rom. x. 9. If thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart, that God raised him from the dead—1 John iv. 3. Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God. 1 John iv. 15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him. John i. 49. Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel. John vi. 68, 69. Lord to whom should we go?—We believe and are sure, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 1 John v. 20. This is the true God and eternal life. Col. i. 14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

2. Their

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2. Their hope in the promises.

Heb. xi. 14. *These were persuaded of the promises and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, declaring plainly, they seek a better country.* Col. i. 27. *Christ in you the hope of glory.* Ver. 5. *The hope laid up for you in heaven.* Ephes. ii. 12. *Ye were—without hope.* 1 Pet. i. 3. *Begotten again to a lively hope.*

3. Of their subjection to the authority of Christ, and the order of his church.*

2 Cor. ix. 13. *Your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ.* 1 Cor. xiv. 40. *Let all things be done decently, and in order.* 2 Thess. iii. 6. *Withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly.* 1 Cor. x. 32. *Give no offence to the church of God.*

4. The

* This subjection must be consistent with the right of private judgment, in matters of conscience, and with all the natural and civil obligations of life; and can only relate to the rules and orders Christ has expressly given.

4. The sincerity of their profession should be evidenced by good works.

James ii. 18. *I will shew thee my faith by my works.* 1 John iii. 3. *He that hath this hope in himself, purifieth himself even as he is pure.* Tit. i. 16. *They profess to know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.*

Particularly,

1st, They should appear to be free from all gross and scandalous sins.

Gal. ii. 24. *They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts—such as* 1 Cor. v. 11. chap. vi. 9. *Fornication, covetousness, idolatry, railing, drunkenness, extortion, adultery, theft.* Gal. v. 19, 20. *Lasciviousness, witchcraft, [or malicious combinations with invisible wicked spirits] * hatred, sedition, heresy* [or

* *Witchcraft, or malicious combinations, &c.]* Whatever there might, or might not be in such combinations, it is well known many of the

[or factiously dividing the church] *envy, murder, and such like.*

2. They should be ready to deny themselves, and suffer for Christ's sake, when called thereunto.

Matt. xvi. 22. *If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* 1 Pet. iv. 13. *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are made partakers of Christ's sufferings.* 2 Titus iii. 12. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* Rev. ii. 10. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer—Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

3. They

Heathens were then (and are to this day) very much addicted to what *they* at least *imagine* to be such. But as the word (*φασγαννα*) signifies also *poisons*, it may signify here, that more private and malicious sort of murder, perpetrated by means of some poisonous composition, administered for that purpose. See Dr. *Doddridge* and Dr. *Whitby* on the place.

3. They should be just and faithful to all men.

Mark x. 19. *Defraud not.* 1 Cor. vi. 8, 9. *Ye do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*

4. They should be disposed to cultivate the spirit of universal benevolence, and evidence it in their whole conduct.

1 Cor. xiii. 2. *And have no charity I am nothing.* Matt. v. 44. *Love your enemies—do good to them that hate you.* Gal. vi. 10. *Let us do good unto all men, especially to the household of faith.* 1 John iii. 16. *And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* [i. e. should providence call us to it.]

5. They should love and practise the duties of piety and devotion, in their secret retirements, families, (if any) and the church of God, constantly.

2 Thes. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*
Matt.

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Matt. vi. 6. When thou prayest enter into thy closet—shut thy door and pray to thy Father. Tit. ii. 12. The grace of God teaches us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live godly in this present world. Josh. xxiv. 15. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. Jer. x. 25. Pour out thy fury upon the families that call not upon thy name. Psal. xxvi. 8. Lord I have loved the habitation of thy house, the place where thy honour dwelleth. Psal. xxvii. 4. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life. Heb. x. 25. Not forsaking the assembling yourselves together.

6. They should have a due government of their tongues.

Ephes. iv. 31. Let all clamour and evil speaking be put away from you. Jam. i. 26. If any bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain.

7. They should live above all undue influence from this present world, and have their

their hearts and affections prevailingly fixed upon a better.

1 John v. 4. *Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.* 1 John ii. 15. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* Col. iii. 2. *Set your affections on things above.* Phil. iii. 20. *Our conversation is in heaven.* Heb. xi. 13. 16. *Strangers and pilgrims on earth—they desire a better country, &c.*

8. They should be sober, and temperate in all things.

1 Cor. ix. 25. *Temperate in all things.* 1 Pet. i. 13. *Be sober.* 1 Thess. iv. 4. *That every one know how to possess his vessel, in sanctification and honour.*

(II.) As the separation,* or excommunication

* This separation, &c. respects the delinquent's exclusion from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and his right of voting in the church, and all the peculiar privileges of the society. And is an ordinance of Christ, de-

cation of those that are already members.
Observe,

1st. The occasion.

1. Absolutely denying, or factiously opposing any * essential article of the Christian faith, obstinately persisting in the same.

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signed to preserve the peace and good order, and particularly the moral purity of the churches. See Matt. vii. 6. 2 Thes. iii. 6. 14, 15. 1 Cor. x. 22. Jude 23. 1 Tim. v. 22.

* 1. What these *essential* articles are, every particular church (as well as person) will, I suppose, claim a right of judging for themselves.— But surely, they should be very tender and cautious, lest they rank any other doctrines under that title, than what are *clearly*, and *plainly asserted* as such in the *word of God*; and the belief of which is *THERE made necessary* to the true love of God, sincere worship of him, obedience to his will, and the hope of eternal life, as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. (See note 2. chap. 1. prop. 3.) and particularly consult Matt. .5 6, 7. chap.— John xvii. 3. John

Tit. iii. 10. *A man that is an heretick,*
 (αἰρετικὸν * *a wicked sectarian*) *after the first*
and

xiv. 10. 23. Rom. x. 8, 9. John iii. 3. 14.
 36. 1 John iv. 1. 3. 10. 14, 15.

For want of this caution some churches have anathematized persons of real piety and virtue, merely for differing from them in some puzzling hypothesis, and theological speculations invented by some celebrated adept in artificial divinity, and thereby drawn upon themselves the guilt of schism.—Some of the *necessaries*, that many have given us ample catalogues of, are, says Dr. *Jortin* “of so refined a nature, that the understanding can hardly lay hold of them.

“Ter frustra comprensa, manus effugit Imago,
 “Par levibus ventis, volucrique simillima somno.”

Dr. Jortin's preface to his Remarks on Eccl. Hist.

* The word (αἰρεσις) which we translate *heresy*, properly signifies *opinion, sect, division, &c.* and is sometimes used in the New Testament in a *good* (or at least in an innocent) sense; and sometimes in a *bad* one. In a *good* sense, Acts xxvi. 5. In a *bad*, Acts v. 17. 2 Pet. ii. 1. And here (Tit. iii. 10.) αἰρετικὸν, must mean, ‘I con-

and second admonition reject. 2 Tim. ii.

17, 18. *Of whom is Hymeneus and Phile-*

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tus,

ceive, one who wilfully and obstinately opposes the essential articles of the Christian faith; and that contrary to the convictions of his own mind, and with the wicked intention of dividing the Christian church, to make a party for himself. For that the ideas of immorality, and self-condemnation, are implied in the heresy here mentioned, is, I think, very evident from ver. 11. were 'tis said, that such a one is *subverted, sinneth, and is self-condemned.*—As well as that of opposing the essential articles of the Christian faith; which was the case of those mentioned, 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18. And therefore the word *heretic*, cannot, without breach of charity, be applied to any sincere, humble enquirer after truth, who peaceably and conscientiously differs from other Christians, in points not declared in scripture to be necessary to salvation.

It appears from what the apostle says, Acts xxiv. 5. That there may be a just and necessary separation from a church, from a conscientious adherence to essential truths. The sin in that case lies not with the separatist, but with those

*tus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying, the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some—whom I delivered to satan. 1 Tim. i. 20. 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5. If any man teacheth otherwise, and consent not to the words of Christ, and sound doctrine, according to godliness, doing about questions (from whence cometh perverse disputings) from such withdraw thyself.**

2. Any

who impose such terms of communion as are inconsistent with such a regard to truth.

* If this *withdrawing* be understood as respecting the Lord's table, it can mean no more than an *orderly* procedure towards the just suspension of offenders, and not withdrawing ourselves from our place and duty there, upon the apprehension of their unworthiness; for this would be to neglect one duty for the sake of another; to excommunicate ourselves, instead of them; and to pluck up the wheat with the tares.—It is therefore a mistaken zeal for the purity of religion, that leads some people, upon the knowledge of the misbehaviour of their fellow members, immediately to suspend themselves

2. Any scandalous vices or immoralities persisted in without repentance.

Rev. ii. 2. *I know thy works, and how thou canst not bear with them that are evil.*

Heb. xii. 15, 16. *Lest there be any profane person.*—1 Cor. v. 11. 13. *Not to keep company (i. e. intimately) if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one no not to eat, [perhaps at a common,*

I 3 much

from the supper.—Their duty is to keep on still doing that in remembrance of Christ, which he has commanded; and in the mean time to take all just, reasonable, and orderly methods, to bring the offenders to repentance, or the church to her duty in the administration of discipline; and if this cannot be done immediately, to bear and wait till it can; as I think is very evident from the parable of the tares—from the state of the Corinthian church, and the advice the apostle gives them.—And from this consideration, that the unworthiness of others, cannot hurt us, any further than we criminally countenance it.

*much less at the Lord's table]—put away from yourselves that wicked person [mentioned verse 1st].**

* 1st. In the whole business of excommunication the church should act with great caution and seriousness; humble regard to the honour of Christ, the ends of church fellowship, and tender concern for the offender's good; strictly guarding against wrath, malice, party spirit, personal resentment, and the like; or else they must not expect the presence and blessing of Christ in what they do, who in the midst of *justice remembers mercy.*

2d. That it is the offender's *own sin*, and not the sentence of any particular church, or ecclesiastical power whatever, that separates from the body of the faithful, or the *real catholic church.* The sentence of a particular church can only affect his particular relation to them; and therefore one particular society may very lawfully and *consistently* receive those, whom another *uncharitably or rashly rejects.*

3dly. When any person appears to be rejected, in an orderly, serious, and solemn manner, for *real immoralities*, his character will appear so much the more notoriously bad to all good men,

3. Disturbing the peace of the church, in any remarkable or dangerous degree, by obstinate and violent contentions.*

Gal. v. 12. *I would they were cut off that trouble you.* Rom. xvi. 17. *Mark them which cause divisions—and avoid them.—* 2 Thes. iii. 6. *We command you brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the traditions he received of us.* See also 1 Tim. vi. 3. 4. 5.

4. Suffering near relatives to want the necessary

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cessary

and be treated accordingly; which is itself no small punishment.

* Churches should be very careful, how they make the little bickerings, and contentions of their members, occasions of church censures, and suspensions from the table;—but rather, with proper admonitions of the reconciling and peaceable kind, leave the matter with the consciences of the contenders.—For want of this caution, the mere sins of infirmity have sometimes been treated with the most solemn severities due only to gross immoralities.

cessary supports and comforts of life, when able to relieve them.

1 Tim. v. 8.—*If any provide not for his own house he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

2. The manner of proceeding in excluding members.

1. The crime being known; admonitions, exhortations, reproofs and prayers, and such like gentle means are to be first used,* for the restoration of the offender; at first more privately, and then more publickly as the case requires.

Gal. vi. 7. *If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness.*—Mat. xviii. 16, 17.

If

* But perhaps in some cases, where the crime is highly scandalous, it may be more necessary for the honour of religion, the good of the offender, and awakening the caution of the too careless, to proceed *immediately* to excommunication, as soon as the fact is clearly proved. Compare 1 Cor. v. 13. with 2 Cor. vii. 11.

*If thy brother trespass against thee, tell him his fault between thee and him alone, but if he will not hear thee, take one or two more, —and if he will not hear them, tell it to the church.**

1 Tim. v. 20. *Them that sin rebuke before all.* 2 Tim. ii. 25. *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves—if God shall give them repentance.—1 Thes. v. 14. —Warn them that are unruly.*

2. But if such offender appear to be obstinate, and persist in his sin after due endeavours for his repentance, the church should proceed to separate him from her communion.

Mat. xviii. 17. *But if he will not hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man.*† Tit. iii. 10. *After the first and second admonition reject.—This is done.*

1. By withdrawing from him (i. e.) refusing

* See chap. iii. prop. i. and note there.

† See bishop *Burnett* on the articles. Art. xxi. page 205. See also chap. iii. prop. i. and note there.

ing that intimate correspondence with him as at other times, (unless to admonish him of his duty) and perhaps suspending him from the Lord's table, till his repentance, or obstinacy, more fully appear.*

2 Thes. iii. 14, 15. *If any man obey not our word, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed;—yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

2. But

* This suspension from the table, is by some called the *lesser excommunication*; a measure that has no *express* warrant, that I know of, from the word of God; but may perhaps implicitly come under the general rule of *doing all things decently and in order*, and the text here cited for keeping *no company with him*; as communicating with him at the Lord's table, is keeping company with him in the highest sense.

It is doubted by some whether the text, Mat. xviii. 17. refers to church excommunication; as it is said, let him be *to thee*, &c. It is not said to the church. Gill's Body of Divinity, vol. 3. p. 300. But as the church was offended, as well as the particular person, it seems necessari-

2. But in case of scandalous sins, or those less scandalous, yet intirely inconsistent with the main design, and chief ends of church-fellowship obstinately persisted in; the offender, being clearly convicted thereof, should be separated, and excluded intirely from all the special privileges of that church, and all special relation thereunto; *judicially*, by the vote of the church*.—*Declaratively and executively*† by the bishop, elder, or president thereof,—

ly implied, that he should be to the church an heathen.

* 1st. Though the apostles, or other president in the church might guide and direct the business; (1 Tim. i. 20.) yet, that it is an act of the church, is evident from what the apostle says, 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. *Ye are gathered to deliver such a one to Satan*, ver. 7. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 6.

† 2d. The *power of the keys*, as it is often called, or of binding or loosing, with respect to the *external privileges* and communion of the church, seems to be no more than an *executive power*, in the hands of the *pastors, bishops, or elders*; what is properly *decretive, or judicial*, pertaining to the whole body of the church, including both

thereof,—whose proper business it is, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to declare—*such person* (proved guilty of *such and such* crimes) now no longer a member of that church, but by the laws and institution of Christ in that case provided, excommunicated, or separated from all *special relation* to the same, and divested of all interest in the *special* privileges thereof, as a part of the visible kingdom of Christ; and consequently thenceforth to be accounted, and treated by them, as one of the world, the usurped kingdom of satan, until he repent.

3. Which

pastor and people (see chap. iii. prop. ii. note 4.) And even that power with them, must be limited intirely, by the *expres* laws of Christ; for as to the *remitting* and retaining sins, respecting the conscience, neither the ministerial office, nor the church, appears to me from scripture, to have any peculiar power therein annexed to it, more than that of declaring in the name of Christ, that all true penitents are graciously pardoned; and that all impenitents are under guilt and condemnation.

3. Which declaration, should be accompanied with solemn prayer for a divine blessing thereupon, as an ordinance of Christ, appointed for the vindication of his honour, the discountenance of sin, and the advancement of holiness amongst his people.*

1 Cor.

* 1st. Thus excommunication appears to be a mere spiritual ordinance of Christ, designed for maintaining the purity of his church, and the glory of his holiness in the government of it, and cannot extend to the temporal estate, or the natural and civil rights of the offender; nor set aside any of the civil, natural, or moral duties of life, owing to him from the members of the church or others.—See Dr. *Doddridge's fam. expof.* vol. v. page 422 and 581, to which I have been able to refer the reader, but since this note was written.

2. The prayer accompanying excommunication, whether before or after the sentence, or rather both; will doubtless consist in confession of sins, bewailing the state of the delinquent, and petitions for his recovery, and that the solemn procedure upon it may have a proper effect upon others.

1 Cor. v. 7, 13. *Purge ye out the old leaven—put away from amongst yourselves that wicked person.*

1 Cor. v. 4, 5. *In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye are gathered together to deliver such a one to satan, for the destruction of the flesh.* 1 Tim. i. 20.

2 Thes. iii. 6. *We command you brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus, to withdraw yourselves, &c.* Phil. iv. 6. *In every thing by prayer and supplication—let your request be made known to God.* 1 Tim. iv. 5. *For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

3. But in case any such offender manifest true repentance, he is to be encouraged therein, and received again, at his request, into their communion.

2 Cor. ii. 7. *Ye ought to forgive and comfort him, lest he be swallowed up with over much sorrow.* And verse 11. *Lest satan get an advantage.*

X. When any matter happens to be debated in the church, the brethren have equal liberty to speak their sentiments, for or against the

the question; though they ought to do it with seriousness, decency, and order; to which, as president, the pastor or elder present, has power to oblige them, by the laws of Christ.*

Thus

* When any question, duly considered, is put to the vote of the church for determination, the *minor* part, out of regard to the honour of Christ, and their common edification, ought peaceably to submit to the *major*, as far as they possibly can, without sinning against their consciences; according to the rule, 1 Pet. v. 5. *Be ye subject to one another.*

2. I take it for granted, that every doubtful question in which the church is concerned, is to be determined (after due debate) by the votes of the majority, as the most natural and orderly way.

3. In some weighty cases perhaps, not less than two thirds of the brethren, should be deemed a sufficient majority. But in all cases, both sides should be cautious of pushing things to extremities.—It is better to give up our opinion, where conscience is not concerned, and after a modest defence, than to break the peace of the church.—But where a minority cannot, after due consideration, in conscience submit,

Thus *Acts* xv. iv. 22. We find the apostles, elders, and brethren of the church, debating the matter concerning the necessity of observing the Mosaic rites, with great

they ought peaceably to remove.—The majority having no authority over the consciences of a minority, by any law of Christ.

4thly. It is a gross abuse of this privilege, when the more ignorant, who think more highly of themselves than they ought, obstinately insist upon their opinion against the sense of the more knowing and judicious, as is too often the case.—In matters of conscience, those of the meanest abilities have a right to use all *lawful* means of supporting, and enjoying their liberty; but in other cases they should be willing to hearken to the advice, and comply with the judgment of those that have better capacities, and opportunities for knowing what is most expedient;—and they should take particular care that pride, and the lust of power, does not actuate them under the pretence of conscience, *Ephes.* v. 21. *Submit yourselves to one another in the fear of God.* *Phil.* ii. 3. *Let nothing be done thro' strife, or vain glory.*—*Rom.* xii. 16.—*Be not wise in your own conceits.*

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great freedom and regularity, according to that rule, 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40. *Let all things be done to edifying—decently and in order.*

Rom. xvi. 17. *Mark them that cause divisions and offences—and avoid them.* Heb. xiii 17. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.*

(XI.) Women have no right to rule, teach, advise, dispute, (or vote) in the church.*

K

1 Cor.

*1st. A woman may be allowed to speak in the church as a witness or evidence, to any matter of fact under debate, and to satisfy them, as to her qualifications for church-fellowship; tho' with respect to the latter, it would (I should think) be more decent for her to speak only to a few deputed to hear her, or give what she has to say in writing.

2d. As to the acts of worship, it may be objected perhaps that the apostle evidently supposes it as an allowed case, that *women* might *pray and prophecy*, i. e. speak in public, by his giving rules about their conduct therein. 1 Cor. xi. 5, &c.—To which it may be answered; that perhaps the apostle might intend only, their appearing to *join* with *others* in those acts, and not

1 Cor. xiv. 34. *Let your women keep silence in the churches,—for they are commanded to be under obedience.*—1 Tim. ii. 8, 10, 11, 12. *I will that men pray every where,—*

their speaking *themselves* as teachers or leaders in the worship; or at most, that they might speak *themselves only*, when under an immediate inspiration, as they doubtless then sometimes were, as well as the men. Acts ii. 16, 18. chap. xxii. 9. So Dr. Doddridge and Dr. Benson solve the difficulty.—Dr. Lightfoot, vol. ii. p. 1161, understands *prophecy*, of singing psalms, in which, as in prayers, women might join with their fellow-worshippers as is usual amongst us. Prophecy being often put for praising. 1 Chron. xxv. 3. —But perhaps the case might be thus, *viz.*—The women in those times by the custom of their country, the Greeks in particular (and such were the Corinthians) lay under peculiar restraints as to their appearance in public company; and upon most public occasions, used to have their separate apartments to which the men were not admitted, except of the nearest kindred; hence it is highly probable, the Christian women had their separate assemblies, (sometimes occasionally at least) for prayer and pro-

*where,—but I suffer not a woman to teach,
—nor to usurp authority over the man, but
to be in silence, and learn in silence with all
subjection.—Thus Acts vi. 3. The brethren*

K 2

are

phesying, and other acts of private worship, as the apostle intimates. 1 Cor. vii. 5. And when, tho' the men were not present, it became them to be *veil'd*, because of the *angels* who were invisible witnesses of their behaviour; or because of those men who might be appointed *messengers* for regulating their assembly, and their business in it.—Admitting this, then it is evident the apostle in the xi. chap. speaks of the women's *praying and prophesying* in their own separate assemblies, and not in the mixt company of the men, as chap. xiv.—And 'tis observable, that in chap. xi. the apostle does not use the word *church* or *churches*, nor say any thing of their *praying or prophesying* therein, not esteeming the assemblies of women as *churches*.—But in the xiv. chap. He speaks of those more public assemblies or *churches*; and declares it as a *commandment* from the Lord, that *there* the woman should be intirely silent,—neither *pray, prophesy*, nor ask questions. This last solution I owe chiefly to Dr.

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are directed to chuse the deacons. And in the famous church meeting, Acts xv. we find the whole church no other than the apostles, elders and brethren. ver. 22, 23.

(XII.)

Taylor's judicious note on Rom. xvi. 1. at the end of his paraphrase.

3. I object against *womens voting* in the church.
1st. Because we have no account of their any way acting in, or even of their *being present* at church-meetings of business.—At the church-meeting, Acts vi. 2, &c. For the choice of deacons, the direction is, BRETHREN look ye out amongst you seven men, &c.—At another church-meeting upon a point of conscience, Acts xv. 4, 22, 23. The apostles, elders and brethren are stilled, the WHOLE CHURCH; and debate, and determine the business they met upon, without any notice taken of the women.

2. Because their *voting* in the church, appears to me inconsistent with their state of subjection; and contrary to the express scripture rule, concerning their behaviour in general, and in the church in particular; viz. that they should be in silence, not speak in the church, be under obedience, not usurp authority over the man, but learn in silence

(XII.) But if any woman in church communion, be dissatisfied with the church's proceeding, in any case of conscience, she may acquaint the pastor, or any of the brethren with it; who may, if necessary, acquaint the church, which is bound to give her

K 3

satisfaction

with all subjection.—Expressions that appear to me quite incompatible with the power of *voting* in the church; which seems to imply rule, government, at least a judicial decision: and supposing their votes to be given by the silent sign of holding up the hand, or the like, yet if a majority, as might be the case, they would then *apparently determine and decide against* the men, and consequently exercise *authority over* them, and not be in *any* sense in *subjection*.

3. Because tho' women ought to enjoy the rights of conscience and private judgment, as fully as the men; yet this may be done in the way the apostle points out to us; *viz. by their inquiring, &c. of their husbands*, or (which is the same thing, where that cannot be) of their parents, brothers, or some proper friends, at home; by which means their sentiments may be known, and a regard paid to them, consistent with their duty of subjection, and the preservation of the

satisfaction if possible; if not, she has power of removing her communion elsewhere.—
See chap. iv. prop. iii. sect. 5. note.

1 Cor. xiv. 35. *If they (the women) will learn any thing let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.* 2 Cor. i. 24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith.*

Besides the general duties of worship and discipline, before mentioned, there are several particular, and important ones, belonging to church members as such,* which may be noted

rights of conscience also.—As for instance in the choice of a minister, they have doubtless a right to be satisfied as well as the men, and therefore should be consulted by a proper deputation from the church, and their sentiments should have their proper weight, and be duly regarded, which for all *reasonable purposes* would be just the same, as if *given by vote* in the church; and so of other matters of conscience and right.—For it is not the *giving* their sentiments, but the *manner* of doing it, &c. that I object to.—

* Most of these duties indeed belong to them as Christians, whether in special communion

Chap. 3. *Womens privilege in the church.* 127

noted under the following heads, the contents of —

CHAP. IV.

with any particular church or not; but in case they are, they ought to look upon themselves under more and far greater obligations thereunto, from their more public profession and solemn vows as before hinted. chap. ii. prop. vii. sect. iv.



CHAP. IV.

CHAP. IV.

Of the duties of church members,

I. *To their bishops, elders, or ministers of the word.*

II. *To one another in particular.*

III. *To the church in general to which they belong.*

IV. *In respect of the world.*

V. *Respecting their age—sex—condition.*

VI. *To magistrates.*

VII. *To their domestics or families.*

I. **T**O their bishops, elders or ministers of the word.

The duties of church members are,

(I.) To treat them with distinguishing honour, esteem, and love.

1 Cor.

1 Cor. iv. 1. *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* 1 Tim. v. 17. *Let the elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double honour; especially they that labour in the word and doctrine.* 1 Thes. v. 11, 12. *Know them that have the rule over you, and esteem them very highly in love for their works sake.*

(II.) Cordially to receive and submit to their administrations, in doctrine and discipline, so far as is consistent with true Christian liberty, and the due preservation of the rights of conscience, and private judgment.*

1 Pet.

* Thus in a gospel church rightly constituted, there is no room for the most detestable of all tyranny (*viz.*) the arbitrary exercise of ecclesiastical power, or priestly dominion over the consciences and civil rights of mankind; and yet that there is a governing authority, and ruling power entrusted with, and invested in the proper officers of a church, is evident to me from the scriptures here quoted, and many others:

1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. *Laying aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.*

James i. 21, 22. *Lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word. Be doers of the word and not hearers only.* Heb. xiii.

17. *Obey them that have the rule over you.* ver. 7. *And have spoken unto you the word of God.* ver. 17. *And submit yourselves for they watch for your souls.* 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. *Addicted themselves to the ministry,—submit yourselves unto such.*

(III.) To follow their example in particular, so far as they are followers of Christ.

1 Cor. xi. 1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ.* Heb. xiii. 7. *Whose faith*

though that power is strongly limited by the laws of Christ; and appears to be *directory, declarative and executive only*, and not legislative, or properly coercive.—See chap. iii. prop. i. and notes there.

faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

(IV.) To pray heartily for them.

1 Thes. v. 25. Col. iv. 3. Heb. xiii. 18. *Pray for us.* 2 Thes. iii. 1, 2. *Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.*

(V.) To provide for their temporal support and maintenance, in the most effectual manner they can.

Gal. vi. 6. *Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things.* 1 Cor. ix. 7. 13, 14. *Who goeth a warfare at his own charge? the Lord hath ordained that they that preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.* Matt. x. 10. *The workman is worthy of his meat—*

And this should be done with such liberality as,

(1) May

(1) May set them above contempt in their station.

2 Cor. viii. 21. *Providing for honest* [*καλα, decent and honourable*] *things, not only in the sight of the Lord but of men.* 1 Tim. v. 17, 18. *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine: For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn: and the labourer is worthy of his reward.*

(2) Free them from the entanglements and cares of this life, so that they may devote themselves intirely to their ministry.

2 Tim. ii. 4. *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.* Rom. xii. 7. *Or ministry let us wait on our ministry, or he that teacheth on teaching.* 1 Tim. iv. 13, 15. *Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine—Meditate on these things, give thyself WHOLLY to them.*

(3) Enable

(3) Enable them. to provide decently for their families.—For,

1 Tim. v. 8. *If any provide not for his own house he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* Rom. xii. 17. *Provide things honest [or decent, κατὰ] in the sight of all men.*

(4) Put them into a capacity of entertaining their friends, and assisting the distressed.*
For,

1 Tim.

* It is clear from all the scriptures above referred to, as well as the reason of things, that ministers of the gospel should, if possible, devote themselves to the work of the ministry.—That in *that* case, they have a *right* to maintenance from their people.—And that not as matter of *charity*, as some are ready to imagine, but of *justice*.—And also that this maintenance ought to be proportioned (as far as the peoples abilities will admit) to the services expected of them, the circumstances of their families, the nature of the places where they reside—So that they may be, not *barely* defended from the miseries of hunger and nakedness, (as is too often the

1 Tim. iii. 2. *A bishop must be given to hospitality.*

(VI.)

case) but enabled to *practise* as well as preach *liberality and charity*; and support their sacred character, with a suitable decorum and reputation in the eye of the world.—It by no means follows, as some people seem willing to think it does, viz. that because there are *some* instances of one sort of Christian ministers, excessively enriching themselves by the revenues of the church, (sometimes to the prejudice of religion) therefore others should be denied *what*, in the nature of things, is *absolutely necessary* for their decent and comfortable maintenance, and the enabling them to pursue their studies with that freedom and attention necessary for the due improvement of their minds, and the more effectual support of the credit and interest of religion; or that because their minister may have some substance of his own, that therefore the people should be excused, and leave him to spend that substance in supporting a character, which, by the laws of Christ and common justice, they ought to support themselves, if able. See Mr. Rees's sermon, entitled, *A modest plea for the maintenance of the Christian ministry.*

(VI.) To endeavour to support and encourage them under their afflictions and trials.

2 Tim. iv. 16. *At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.*

Acts xii. 5. *Prayer was made by the church for (Peter in prison.)*

(VII.) To assemble at their invitation at any fit time on due notice, for any more particular occasional duties of devotion and discipline.

Acts xiv. 27. *And when they (Paul and Barnabas) were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done.*

(VIII.) They should also prudently acquaint their ministers with their afflictions, and desire their prayers for and with them.

James v. 13. *Is any afflicted? let him pray. Is any sick among you? let him send for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him.*

(IX.)

(IX.) If they have more pastors or teachers than one, they should take heed of undue distinctions, and dividing into parties in favour of one to the prejudice of the other.

1 Cor. i. 10. 12. *That there be no divisions—every one saying, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas.* Chap. iii. 4. *For while one saith I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?*

II. The duties of all Christians, and particularly of church members *one towards another—are—*

(I.) To love one other with a sincere spiritual affection.

John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, that ye love one another, with a pure heart fervently.*

Which love ought to be particularly manifested.

(1) By bearing one anothers burdens, Gal. vi. 2.

(2) By

(2) By praying one for another, James v. 6. Eph. vi. 18.

(3) By visiting one another, especially in affliction, James i. 27. Matt. xxv. 36.

(4) By distributing to each others necessities, Rom. xii. 13.

(5) By seeking every one another's wealth, 1 Cor. x. 24.

(6) By rejoicing with those that rejoice, weeping with those that weep, Rom. xii. 15.

(7) By using hospitality to each other without grudging, 1 Pet. iv. 9, 10.

(8) By being pitiful, courteous, loving as brethren, 1 Pet. iii. 8.

(II.) They should sometimes meet together for social prayer, and free converse on religious subjects.*

Lev. Heb.

* Stated religious conferences in particular, should be managed with great caution and prudence; or else, instead of answering any valuable ends, they will serve only to expose the weakness of some, cherish the spiritual pride of

Heb. x. 24, 25. *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together—But exhorting one another.* Mal.

iii. 16. *Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them.*

Matt. xviii. 19, 20. *If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing ye shall ask, it shall be done for them—For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Col. iv. 2. *Continue in prayer.* Acts xii.

5. 12. *Prayer was made of the church—many praying (for Peter) Acts i. 14.—all these continued with one accord in prayer.*

(III.)

others, bring strife and contention into the church, and thereby religion itself into contempt. And even *social prayer*, though a more manifest and necessary duty, and what should be encouraged more than it is, is not without its inconveniencies and dangers, if not properly conducted.

(III.) They should endeavour to season their more accidental and occasional converse with good things.

Col. iv. 6. *Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.* Ephes. iv. 29. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good for edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

(IV.) They should cultivate peace and harmony one with another.

Ephes. iv. 3. *Keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* 2 Cor. iii. 14. *Be of one mind, live in peace.* Rom. xiv. 19. *Follow after the things that make for peace.*

To this end,

(1) They should be subject to one another in humility, 1 Pet. v. 5.

(2) Not provoke, or envy one another, Gal. v. 26.

L. 2 (3) Do

(3) Do nothing through strife or vain glory, Phil. ii. 3:

(4) In honour prefer one another, Rom. xii. 10.

(5) Forbear one another in love, Rom. xv. 1.

(6) Forgive one another if any have a quarrel, Col. iii. 13.

(7) Not avenge themselves, but give place unto wrath, Rom. xii. 19.

(8) Not rashly judge one another, Rom. xiv. 13. Matt. vii. 1.

(9) Speak not evil one of another, Jam. iv. 11.

(10) Avoid whisperings and backbitings, 1 Cor. xii. 20.

(11) Terminate, as far as possible, all differences amongst themselves, 1 Cor. vi. 4. 7.

(12) Mutually give and take reproof in the spirit of meekness.

Matt. xviii. 15. *If thy brother trespass—tell him his fault.* Gal. vi. 1. *Restore such a one in the spirit of meekness,*

III. Church members in particular, have duties incumbent on them to the church in general, viz.

(1) To submit cordially to the order and discipline of the church, so far as they can conscientiously.

Ephes. v. 21. *Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God.* 1 Cor. xi. 22. *Or despise ye the church of God?* Matt. xviii. 17. *If he neglect to hear the church.*

(2) To devote their gifts, graces and abilities, to the service of the church in a proper and consistent manner.

1 Pet. iv. 10. *As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister the same.* Rom. xii. 6, 7. *Whether prophesy, let him prophesy—or ministry, let him wait on his ministry—He that giveth, with liberality.*

(3) To take care of their poor relatives, as

far as they are able, that the church be not burdened.

1 Tim. v. 4. 8. 16. *But if any widow have children, or nephews, [or grand-children] let them, i. e. the children, &c. learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents. If any provide not for his own house he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel—If any that believe have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged.*

(4) To pay a particular regard to the interest of the church, and keep their places in it, as long as a good conscience, and as far as providential circumstances, will permit.*

Acts

* 1. In cities and great towns where there are several churches, and where the members of those churches may happen to live at a considerable distance, from the place where the church to which they belong usually meets, it cannot be unlawful for them to attend the common duties of public worship occasionally at

Acts ii. 42. *And they continued stedfast, in the apostles doctrine, and breaking of bread, and prayers. Ver. 44. And all they that believed, were together.—*Heb. x. 23. 25. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*

5. If they withdraw from the church's communion on any account, such as great distance from the church, better edification, or the preserving a good conscience, they should do it as peaceably and orderly as possible.*

L 4

Rom.

least, nearer home: though a distinguishing regard should be paid to that particular society with which they have connected themselves, in order to keep up a due decorum in religion, and prevent that anarchy and confusion, and even ruin to the very existence of particular churches, which must be the consequence of indiscriminate and unconnected assemblies.

* 2. Where a church out of prejudice, and an uncharitable spirit of resentment, or the like,

Rom. xiv. 5. 33. *Let every man be persuaded in his own mind—for what is not of faith is sin.* 1 Tim. iii. 3, 4, 5. *If any teach otherwise—from such withdraw thyself.* 2 Tim. iii. 2. 1 Cor. x. 32. *Give none offence to the church of God.* 1 Cor. xii. 25. *That there be no schism in the body.*

6. To

denies a member a regular dismissal, upon his peaceable request; such member may remove his communion without it; for as every particular church is a *voluntary* society, it can have no right to detain any of its members, against their consent, or voluntary choice. 1 Cor. i. 24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith.—Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.* Rom. xiv. 15. And let it be always remembered, as a fundamental principle in this case, that Christ has delegated to no man, or body of men, not even to his CHURCH, (in whatever sense the word be taken) any power, inconsistent with his prerogative, or subversive of the natural rights of conscience and private judgment, in spiritual matters. See chap. iii. prop. viii. note there, and elsewhere.

6. To study the church's peace, purity, and edification.

Rom. xiv. 19. *Follow after the things that make for peace, and wherewith one may edify another.* Col. iii. 15. *To which you are called in one body.* Heb. xii. 14. *Follow after holiness—*

To which ends particularly,

(1) They should carefully study, and practise the duties of love, and peace before mentioned.

Ephes. iii. 17. *Being rooted and grounded in love.*

2. They should endeavour to improve their acquaintance with the principles of their holy religion, as they are found in the holy scriptures.

Heb. v. 12. *When for the time ye ought to have been teachers of others, ye have need, that one teach you again—the first principles of the oracles of God.* Col. iii. 16. *Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you in all wisdom.*

wisdom. Acts xvii. 11. *And searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so,* John v. 39.

3. They should endeavour to maintain the liberty of the gospel, and the sacred rights of conscience, against all impositions.

Gal. v. 1. 13. *Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free—for ye have been called unto liberty.* See the conclusion.

4. They should endeavour to maintain the doctrines of the gospel, in their purity, against all false teachers, and their plausible reasonings.*

Jude

* These endeavours should be governed by prudence, meekness, charity—and not suffered to break out into angry contentions, and party strife, about little circumstances, and mere modes of faith, &c. Nor into a furious zeal and persecuting rage against the persons, or the natural and civil rights and possessions, of even infidels themselves.—For the weapons of our warfare, are not carnal, 2 Cor. x. 4.—In meekness instructing

Jude 3. *Contend earnestly for the faith:*
1, John iv. 1. *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone forth into the world.* Col. ii. 4, 8. *Lest any man beguile you, through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the traditions of men.* Phil. i. 27. *Striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

(5.) They should pray heartily for the church's prosperity.

Psal. cxi. 6.—*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.* Isa. lxii. 7.—*Give him no rest, till he hath made Jerusalem a praise.*

(IV.) There are duties, which all christians, and especially church members, should attend to in respect of the *world**: as a distinct body from them, viz.

(1.) To them that oppose themselves, 2 Tim. ii. 25.—*All contention for the faith, in the way of rage and violence, is utterly inconsistent with the genius of the gospel.* See the conclusion, sect. 8.

* By the *world* here, is meant all prophane and vicious persons, who appear void of seri-

(1.) To bear a prudent testimony against the evil practices of the world.

Rev. xviii. 4. *Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins.* Eph. v. 7, 11. *Be ye not partakers therefore with them,—have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* James i. 27. *Keep himself unspotted from the world.*—And therefore

(2.) Not to intermarry with infidels, and prophane persons.*

2 Cor.

ous christianity, and the fear of God, of what party soever they may *nominally* be; and not any *particular party* as such, as some too often uncharitably apply the word.

* This rule does not confine church members, from marrying with those that happen not to be in actual communion with any particular church, while in other respects they appear to fear God; or pay a decent regard to the duties of morality, and sincerely assent to the Christian religion as true: much less from marrying with the members of any other church.—Tho' what may be expedient in these cases, prudence must dictate.

2 Cor. vi. 14.—*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.* 1 Cor. 7. 39. *Be married to whom she will only in the Lord.*

(3.) But to converse with them in all other respects freely, as fellow creatures, and members of the same civil and political community.

Mat. v. 47. *If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?* 2 Cor. x. 27.—*If any that believe not, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat.* 1 Cor. v. 9, 10. *I wrote unto you not to keep company with fornicators, &c.—yet not altogether—for then must ye needs go out of the world.*

N. B. But if any man that is called a brother be guilty of those sins we are not to keep company with him. Verse 11.

(4.) To endeavour to live in a peaceable and reputable manner amongst them, providing for themselves, the necessaries and decencies of life, as far as possible.

Rom. xii. 17. *Provide all things honestly*
[decent]

[*decent*] in the sight of all men.—2 Cor. viii. 21. Heb. xii. 14.—Follow peace with all men. 1 Thes. iv. 11, 12. Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, that you may walk honestly, [*εὐσχημόνως* decently respectably] towards them that are without, and have lack of nothing.

(5.) To set them a good example, in all the duties of religion and morality.

1 Pet. ii. 12. Having your conversation honest [*καθάρως* beautiful, honourable, reputable] amongst the gentiles, that they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God. Col. iv. 5. Walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Mat. v. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they beholding your good works may glorify your Father which is in heaven.

(6.) To pray for them, and do them all the good offices in their power, (consistent with other duties) even tho' their actual enemies.

1 Tim. ii. 12. I exhort, that supplication and prayers be made for all men. Mat.

v. 44. *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. Tit. iii. 2. Speak evil of no man,—be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness, unto all men.*

(V.) There are duties respecting their age, sex, condition, &c. to which Christians, especially church members, should pay a particular regard.

(1.) Age and sex.

1. Pet. v. 5. *Ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder. 2 Tim. ii. 22.—Flee also youthful lusts.—Tit. ii. 6. Young men also exhort to be sober-minded. Lev. xix. 32.—Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.—Tit. ii. 2. That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in the faith, in charity, in patience.—(v. 3.) The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers [*διαβόλος* make-bates, calumniators] not given to much wine, teachers of good things; (v. 4.) That they*
may

may teach the young women, to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. (v. 5.) To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, [*οικουρως* careful of domestic affairs] good, obedient to their husbands.—1 Tim. ii. 9, &c. That women adorn themselves, with modest [*κοσμιω* neat, decent, becoming] apparel, with shamefacedness, and sobriety, not with broidered [*πλεγμασιον* braided, plaited] hair*,
or

* As one design of dress is, to distinguish the conditions, and ranks of life, it cannot be supposed that the apostle here intended to prohibit intirely, the wearing of gold, and the use of proper ornaments; seeing other scriptures, speak of those things with approbation, at least without censure, (Gen. xxiv. 22. Psal. xlv. 13, 14. Mat. vi. 29. Prov. xxxi. 21, 22.) These precepts therefore, must be understood comparatively, as John vi. 27. Where our Lord says, *Labour not for the meat that perisheth*: And are thus particularly and strongly expressed, to remind Christian women, that the purity and dignity of their character, and the glorious hopes and expectations they have in another world, lay them under very great and serious obligations, to restrain all undue fondness for the

or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but as be-
cometh women professing godliness, with
good works.—Learn in silence—not teach—
nor usurp authority over the man. 1 Pet. iii.
3, 4. &c. Whose adorning, let it be the
hidden man of the heart, in that which is not
corruptible,—a meek and quiet spirit, which
is in the sight of God of great price.

(2.) Condition, &c.

1 Tim. vi. 17, &c. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high

M *minded.*

glittering ornaments of dress; and to employ most of their time and care, in cultivating and adorning their *minds*, with those graces and virtues, which render them amiable even in the sight of God.—That though they ought to dress with decency and propriety, agreeable to the customs of the country, and times they live in, and to their different ages, conditions, and ranks in life; yet *herein* they should follow the dictates of good sense, and religion, not of vanity; and take particular care to distinguish themselves, from the *looser part* of their sex; who dress upon vicious principles, and with vicious designs.

minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in
 the living God: that they be rich in good
 works, ready to distribute, willing to commu-
 nicate, laying up for themselves in store a
 good foundation against the time to come,
 that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 John
 iii. 17. *Whofo hath this world's goods, and
 seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up
 his bowels of compassion from him, how dwel-
 leth the love of God in him?* Jer. ix. 23.
Let not the rich man glory in his riches.
 Prov. xxii. 16. *He that oppresseth the poor,
 to encrease his riches—shall surely come to
 want.* Jam. i. 9. *Let the brother of low
 degree [i. e. in this world] rejoice that he is
 exalted [i. e. as a christian to the hope of a
 better] (10) But the rich [in this world's
 goods] in that he is made low [i. e. blest with
 the grace of humility.] Jam. v. 9. Grudge
 not one against another. Heb. xiii. 5. *Be
 content with such things as ye have.* Ecclef.
 x. 20. *Curse not the rich.* (See Luke xiii.
 16. chap. xvi. 19, 21, & chap. v. prop. 1.
 sect. 3. and texts there.) 2 Thes. iii. 10
 —12. *For this we commanded you, that if*
*any**

any would not work, neither should he eat.

*—For some walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies.—Such we command and exhort, by the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. And 1 Thes. iv. 11. do their own business and work, &c.**

M 2

VI.

* 1. From these scriptures it appears that the vices to which the *rich* are more particularly exposed, and should therefore more particularly guard against, are—pride, haughtiness, excessive love of money, and confidence in it; idleness, self-indulgence, vanity, luxury, wantonness, oppression of the poor, and neglect of religion and another world.—The virtues they are more particularly called to exercise are—gratitude to God, humility and condescension to men, œconomy in the management, and temperance in the enjoyment of their riches: considering themselves as the stewards of God; providing for their families, and dependants, in a manner agreeable to their necessities, and their own substance and rank in life, duly considered; together with a tender liberality to the poor, and a due regard to the support of the interest

VI. There are duties which Christians, (church members in particular) owe to magistrates, &c.

viz.

of true religion and virtue, and the common good of their country.—And in avoiding those and all other vices, and the cultivating these and all other virtues, consisteth that real greatness and excellency, to which, above all things, they should aspire.

The vices to which the poor are peculiarly liable, and should be particularly watchful against, are—discontent, despondency, murmuring at providence, and distrust of it; envying the (too often but seeming) happiness of the rich; sloth, ignorance, uncleanness, rioting, theft, or other unwarrantable means of supplying their wants; ingratitude to their benefactors, and prescribing to them the measure of their bounty.—The peculiar virtues which they are called to exercise, are—peaceableness and contentment, with the allotments of providence; endeavouring to provide for themselves and their families by honest industry in their several stations and callings; gratitude to those that do them good; submission to the just commands of those they serve; respectful behaviour to their

viz. They must be subject and obedient to the authority of their temporal governors, kings, and all that are appointed under them*, (in all things not contrary to a good conscience, and the express laws of God) and pray particularly for them.

M 3

Rom.

superiors ; patience under the contempt and oppression they may meet with from the weakness or wickedness of the rich ; making God their confidence and hope, seeking his favour as their true happiness.—Virtues, that will render them esteemed and beloved, by all truly wise and good men, notwithstanding the meanness and poverty that may attend them.

* 2. So that a church has no power to make any laws or canons, inconsistent with the just laws of the state, or the rights of civil government ; nor indeed, is there any occasion for it ; the gospel constitution of a church, being (by the all-wise head of it) made to coincide intirely with the natural, social, and civil rights of all men. See chap. ii. prop. 2. and note there. And consequently the *state* must have a right to interfere, so far in the government of the *church*, as to keep it within its own proper limits, and secure all the just ends of civil government.

Rom. xiii. 1, 2, &c. *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers—for they be ordained of God; whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and shall receive to THEMSELVES damnation—for he is the minister of God for good—an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.—Be subject for conscience sake—render tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.* Acts. xxiii. 5. *Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.* Tit. iii. 1. *Put them in mind to be subject to principalities, powers, and to obey magistrates.* 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors—*

(2.) How little countenance the scriptures quoted under this proposition, give to the senseless doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, as taught by some; is shewn, with great clearness and strength of reason, by the late worthy bishop of Winchester (Doctor Hoadly) in his *measures of submission to the civil magistrate, considered.*

nors—Sent by him, Ver. 17. Honour the king. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 3. I exhort that prayers and supplications, with giving of thanks, be made for kings, and all in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness, and honesty. Eccles. x. 20. Curse not the king, no not in thy thoughts. But Acts. v. 29. We ought to obey God rather than man. Acts iv. 29. Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye? Dan. iii. 18. Be it known unto thee O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Mat. xxii. 21. Render unto Cæsar, the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things that are God's.

VII. Church members, in particular, should be careful to discharge all those social duties, that belong to their domestic, or family relations and connections.

Ephes. v. 22. Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands. Verse 25. Husbands love your wives. Verse 28. as their own bodies. Verse 23. So love his wife as him-

self; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. See Col. iii. 18, 19. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2, &c. Col. iii. 20, 21. Children obey your parents in all things. 1 Tim. v. 4. To requite their parents—Fathers provoke not your children to wrath.—But Ephes. vi. 4: Col. iii. 21.* bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Ver. 2. Honour thy father and mother. Col. iii. 22, 23. Ephes. vi. 5, 6, 7. Servants obey your masters according to the flesh, in all things—with fear and trembling—not with eye service, but in singleness of heart—And whatever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to men—as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, With good will. 1 Tim. vi. 1, 4. Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their masters worthy of all honour; and they that have

* *μη ἐπειρίζετε* not contend with them in a chiding provoking manner. Eph: *μη παροργίζετε* don't exasperate their angry passions. Anger in children against their parents is unnatural, and out of character; anger properly belongs to superiors.

have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service. Tit. ii. 9, 10. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their masters, and please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but shewing good fidelity. 1 Pet. ii. 18. Servants, be subject to your own masters, with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. Col. iv. 1. Masters give unto your servants, that which is just and equal. Ephes. vi. 9. forbearing threatening, knowing that your master is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him. Deut. xxiv. 14, 15. Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant, that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren or of thy stranger within thy gates—at his day thou shalt give him his hire—lest he cry against thee unto the Lord—and it be a sin unto thee. Jer. xxii. 13. Wo unto him—that useth his neighbours service, without wages, and giveth him not for his work. Jam. v. 1, 4. Go to now ye rich men, weep for the miseries that shall come upon you—Behold the hire of the labourers, who have reaped

*reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them that have reaped, have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. —*In these family duties are included, the duties of family prayer and instruction; justice and mercy.



CHAP.

C H A P. V.

Of the duties of particular churches, that deserve more especial notice.

I. *Towards their own members.*

II. *Towards other churches, their members, ministers, &c.*

1st. **T**OWARDS their own members, 'tis a church's duty.

(I.) To admit every one of them (unless under censure) to an equal joint right, and title to, and share in, all the spiritual and temporal privileges which they enjoy as a church.

Gal. iii. 28.—*Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

*Jesus. Acts ii. 44. And they that believed had all things common.**

(II.) And consequently, to assemble for the discharge of their common duties, and enjoyment of their common privileges, at such time, and in such manner that all, if possible, may share in them.

1 Cor. xi. 33. *When ye come together to eat, (i. e. the Lord's Supper) tarry one for another.*

(III.) To take care of their poor, and supply their necessities.

Deut. xv. 11. *I command thee saying, thou shalt open thy hand wide unto thy brother, unto thy poor and thy needy, in thy land.*

* But, however extensive this common interest and right might be in the apostles days, it can now be extended no farther, than the privileges and possessions which the church enjoys as a body; and not to any one's particular personal property. See chap. ii. prop. 7. sect. 6. and note there.

land. Gal. ii. 10. We should remember the poor. Rom. xii. 13. Distributing to the necessities of the saints. 1 John iii. 17. See also chap. iv. prop. v. and texts there. See Exod. xxii. 25. Lev. xix. 9.—And for the better discharge of this duty, 'tis evident, the office of deacons was instituted in the church. Acts. vi. 17. See also Job xxxi. 16. Psal. xl. 1, 2, 3. Prov. xi. 24, 25. Chap. xiv. 21. Chap. xix. 17. Chap. xxi. 13. Matt. v. 42. Rom. xii. 8.

(IV.) The whole church should sympathize, in the joys and sorrows of every particular member.

1 Cor. xii. 26. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

(V.) They should put up their united prayers, for any one of them in distress.

Acts xii. 5.—And prayer was made without

*out ceasing of the church unto God, for him
(i. e. Peter in prison.)*

(VI.) They are to exercise a pious care and discipline over them, to their edification, without partiality.

James ii. 9. *If ye have a respect of persons, ye commit sin.*—1 Thes. v. 14. *Brethren warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak.* Jude 16. *Not having mens persons in admiration, to advantage.* Heb. xii. 15. *Looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God,—and any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you.*

(VII.) To grant them letters of dismissal and recommendation to other churches, when desired, so far as they can, consistent with the honour of Christ, and a good conscience:

2 Cor. iii. 1. *Need we epistles of recommendation to you—or from you?* Rom. xvi. 1. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister,*

sister, a servant of the church of Cenchrea.

2 Cor. i. 24. *Not that we have dominion over your faith.*

2. Towards other churches, their members and ministers, 'tis a church's duty

(I.) To own them as churches of Christ, and hold Christian communion with them, in all the duties and privileges of their common religion, as far as they have opportunity, and can do it with good conscience.

[See the conclusion.]

Rom. vi. 16. *The churches of Christ salute you.* 1 Pet. v. 13. *The church at Babylon elected together with you.* Gal. iii.

28. *Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* 1 Cor. xii. 13. 20. *Many members, yet but one body, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free.*

1 John i. 7. *We have fellowship one with another.* 1 Cor. i. 2, 3. *Unto the church of God at Corinth—with all that in every place call on our Lord Jesus Christ, Grace be unto you.* 1 Thes. iv. 9, 10. *Ye are taught of God, to love one another.—And*

ye

ye do it towards all the brethren in Macedonia.

(II.) To receive their members, when recommended to them, and pay them the regard their character and condition requires.

Rom. xvi. 1, 2. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister—receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and assist her in whatever business she hath need of you.* Phil. ii. 29. *Hold such in reputation.* 2 Cor. viii. 23, 24. *They are the messengers of the churches, shew ye to them and before the churches the proof of your love.* 3 John 8. *We ought to receive such, that we may be fellow helpers of the truth.*

(III.) To impart to other churches, such assistance as they want, and their own abilities and opportunities afford.

Acts xi. 29, 30. *The disciples (at Antioch) sent relief, according to their abilities, to support the saints in Judea.* 1 Cor. xvi. 1. *Concerning the collection for the saints,*

saints, as I had given orders to the churches of Galatia. Even so do ye. Col. iv. 16, 17. And when this epistle is read with you, cause also that it be read in the church of the Laodiceans.

(IV.) To make use of their advice, in any matters of difficulty and importance.

Acts xv. 2. *They (the church at Antioch) determined that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question, i. e. of the necessity of circumcision.*



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T H E

C O N C L U S I O N .

THUS, according to my proposal, I have endeavoured, with all possible candour and impartiality, to give my readers a *plain practicable plan of SOCIAL RELIGION*, drawn from the holy scriptures; and particularly from those perfect and authentic models there exhibited (*viz.*) *The churches of the apostolic age*.—Models, every way adapted to the simplicity of the gospel, and the gracious and moral design of Christ's kingdom—intirely clear therefore, of all *bigotry, superstition, and priestcraft*; of the *wisdom and the folly of this world*: and, if not proved to be *expresly of divine appointment* yet, bearing the strongest marks of the *divine interposition and approbation*: capable of answering *all the great ends of social religion*, and consequently highly worthy of the nearest imitation

tion possible, by all Christian societies in every succeeding age.

As a proper close of the whole, I here add a few general observations, in favour of a *greater freedom in church communion*, than is commonly practised; together with a persuasive to *peace and charity*, amongst such as think themselves obliged to dissent from one another.

1. Though the true *Christian church*, because of the great number of its members, and their dispersion through the world, must necessarily be branched out into many distinct societies; yet as they are all professedly embarked in the same cause, under one head of vital influence and government, they are to be considered but as parts of the same whole; composing one intire spiritual body. Gal. iii. 28. *Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. *As—all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ—* for by one spirit, we are baptised into one body. Rom. xii. 5. *We being many are one body in Christ, and members one of another.* Ephes.

ii. 14. 22. And for this reason amongst many others, they ought all to consider themselves, as under the most sacred obligations to do every thing in their power, to preserve this *unity * of the spirit*, in the *bonds of peace and love*, as inviolable as possible, in the face of the world. To this end it is absolutely necessary, that, however different and independent in *some respects*, any of these societies may be, they should be *all* formed upon the most *catholic* and *uniting* principles, *upon the whole*: that they might still appear as *one body*, and by *some common external* means or bond of *social unity*, maintain (if possible) a visible communion one with another.—Such principles are, I think, pointed out in the preceeding pages, as collected from the word of
of

* When the apostle speaks of the *unity of the Spirit*, &c. he does not mean *unity of sentiment*, or opinion, so much as *unity of heart and affection*; and that Christians should hold their different opinions in peace and love, and receive one another in the Lord, notwithstanding. See chap. 2. prop. 1.

of God: and such a means is the Lord's Supper,* as being not only in its own nature, extremely well adapted to answer that purpose, but instituted partly with that design. 1 Cor. x. 16. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?—The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?—For we being many are one bread, and, one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.—I would not that ye should have fellowship with the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils.* From whence, I think, it fully appears, that this institution was intended, amongst other things, to be a standing, visible, external pledge and means, of that divine union and fellowship, all true

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Christians.

* *Baptism*, indeed, by which we are first formally incorporated into the visible church, or body of Christ, is the beginning and foundation of this external communion; but the Lord's Supper, is best adapted, for the constant support and continual manifestation of it.

Christians have with Christ, and one another in ONE BODY, as morally distinguished and separated from the world. So that though it be unquestionably the duty of Christian churches to guard the sacred table, from the approaches of the profane and vicious; it is no less their duty to lay it as open as possible to the free access of ALL,* who appear to love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and are desirous of walking in all his commandments and ordinances blameless.

2. For any Christian society therefore, to deny their brethren communion with them at the Lord's table, ONLY upon the account of their different opinions about the mere modes

* At least for occasional communion. Some assert that the Lord's table should be open even to the most immoral, as a means of reclaiming them. But this is to throw down all distinction between the church and the world; and set up a fellowship between Christ and Belial, contrary to the design of our Christian vocation, and the moral ends of the constitution of the church.

modes of religion, (which is too much the case) must be intirely inconsistent with their common relation to Christ, and one another; the many obligations to unity resulting from it, and the duty of keeping that ordinance as it is delivered to them in the scriptures (1 Cor. xi. 2.) i. e. The keeping it *in that place* of superiority to lesser things, and using it for *those ends*, for which it was appointed.

Those of the *establishment*, may perhaps upon *their principles*, be allowed some shew of reason for such a measure; but the *protestant dissenters*, as making still higher pretences to liberty, seem to me, to act in flat contradiction to those pretences, and the avowed reasons of their dissent, when THEY set up the exercise of an excluding power in the church of God, on such occasions; or attempt to impose terms of communion not clearly laid down, or positively required as such, in the scriptures; or not necessary to the credible profession of the Christian religion, and the securing the main ends of the gospel institutions. And yet this is too com-

monly done against *them*.—They plead exemption from all human authority in matters of conscience, as the natural right of reason, confirmed by revelation; and yet in the case before us, really exercise such an authority themselves, to the prejudice of the rights of others.—They complain of unscriptural impositions in the worship of God, and their being obliged to dissent (partly at least) on that account; and yet by insisting upon unscriptural terms of communion in their own societies, they actually become the abettors of such impositions, and oblige others to dissent from them; or as the apostle with great spirit and propriety expresses it (Acts xv. 10.) *Put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither they, nor their fathers, were able to bear.*—A conduct this, so strange and inconsistent, that it is no easy matter to find any thing like a reasonable excuse for it.—The most reasonable I can think of is, the want of a thorough knowledge and consideration of the nature of Christian liberty, and the whole intention of the sacred supper; and in what the real constitutional

constitutional principles, and discipline of Christian churches consist: or perhaps the dominion of some prejudices of education and custom inadvertently indulged, in favour of particular, and *merely human* systems of doctrine and worship; which though in *words* and even intentions, they may be ready to acknowledge *fallible* and imperfect; they are sometimes *in fact*, too ready to treat, with the implicit veneration and confidence, due only to the *infallible* oracles of God.*

3. It is granted that every Christian church has a right to judge of the fitness of those that offer themselves to her communion; and to admit or reject them according as they do or do not appear possessed of the qualifications really necessary for that purpose.—but then, the church is only to *judge of*, not *appoint* those qualifications; and ought to make

* Though at the same time they acknowledge, that the Bible is the sole infallible standard of religious truth and doctrine, and that this is the very basis of Protestantism. See Art. Ch. Eng. 6. 20. 21.

make the *laws of Christ*, and not her *own inventions*, the *rule* of her judgment. What those qualifications are, has been shewn at large, chap. iii. It is enough for my present purpose, to observe in the general, (what I should think our scrupulous brethren themselves must allow, *viz.*)—That the Lord's Supper, being the *common* pledge of Christian *unity*, and an appointed means of the grace necessary to the comfort and edification of *all* Christians in *common*; it must be their common duty and privilege to attend it; and consequently,—That the qualifications insisted on by any church, as the terms of admission to communion in it, should be *such*, and *ONLY such*, as are *common* to *all* who make a credible profession of the Christian faith, such as they may *all* conscientiously comply with;—and such as agree with the general nature, and are necessary to answer all the moral and gracious ends of the institution; and therefore, not any of those *punctilious peculiarities*, our brethren so strenuously insist on in that case; which are to be found only amongst themselves, or their own party:

party; which numbers of sincere Christians of distinguished judgment and piety, cannot possibly comply with; which are not, in the least degree, necessary to answer any one end of the institution; and which under their management, are made to contradict, instead of agree with, its general nature and design.

Jesus Christ the great prophet of his church, appears to have the same general concern and care for the happiness of *all* his obedient people;—knows the great importance of this ordinance to their spiritual life; graciously endows them *all* in *common* with every moral qualification for it; and solemnly charges them *all*, religiously to observe it; and therefore, I cannot but conclude, that if he had judged his design in it could not have been fully answered, or his people's duty of observing it acceptably performed, without an *intire uniformity of judgment and practice*, in those particular points our brethren are so zealously concerned for, he would have spoken of them with such clearness and precision, that it should have been impossible for any of his sincere followers, who endeavoured

voured to know his will, to have mistaken him; and consequently that they would *all* as generally have been blest with *this* indispensable requisite, this uniformity of judgment, as with any other: whereas the contrary of all this, is undeniably the fact.— Many of the pious followers of Christ, who have sincerely and diligently enquired after the knowledge of his will, in these disputable niceties, have been, and still are, of different sentiments about them. And 'tis to me incredible that so wise and gracious a lawgiver, should suspend so important a branch of instituted worship, as his supper, upon points, that have no concern with the acceptable performance of our duty in it, or the enjoyment of any one of the benefits arising from it: and still more incredible, that he should make an intire unanimity in those points, one of the qualifications, indispensibly necessary to our communion in that ordinance; and at the same time very well knew, that it would be utterly impossible for myriads of true believers in him, to come at such a unanimity, by any means in their power.

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We may therefore I think fairly conclude, that no difference in any of the *non-essential* modes of religion,* can be any just bar to our communing together at the Lord's Table; or give any Christian society a reasonable and warrantable pretence, for excluding their fellow Christians, from a part with them, in that desirable and necessary appointment; but that all who are really intitled to the Christian name, and the *internal* blessings of the Christian covenant, should, upon a credible profession and evidence thereof, be admitted to all the *external* privileges of the Christian church.

4. But that we may be quite clear in this case, and know of a certainty, how far the power and duty of any church extends, as to admission and rejection of such as propose themselves for communion with them at the
Lord's

* I call *all those modes* of religion, whether they relate to faith or to practice *non-essential* that are not expressly declared in so many words in the bible; or that depend on inferences and interpretations given us by fallible men.

Lord's Table, we must have recourse to the precepts and examples recorded in our bibles. And here, in order to overbalance the strong presumptive evidence, already produced, in favour of the more catholic, against the more limited communion: We ought to expect the *clearest* and most *express* direction, for the prohibition of the former, or the maintenance of the latter, or both; I say *express* direction; because it cannot reasonably be supposed that our Lord, who every where claims to himself the special sovereignty and dominion of the church, would leave such a degree of discretionary power in *any of our weak hands*, as that of judging and determining merely at our pleasure, or deciding by our arbitrary interpretations, against the pious desires and claims of his beloved people, in an affair that so nearly concerns his honour and their comfort and duty, as the communion of the sacred table most certainly does. *His express* direction therefore I say, and not *our wills*, his *very word* and not *our private opinions* about it, or *fallible deductions* from it, ought to be expected in this case; in order
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to justify upon *protestant principles* the limited communion I am pleading against. But after the most deliberate and impartial inquiry, I have been able hitherto to make into the records of the *Bible*, I can find no such *direction* there. *That* says a great deal, about our common union in Christ; our equal title to, and joint interest in, all the privileges of the house of God; as being all his children by the same faith; as professedly devoted to him by the same baptism, (at least as to what is essential to that purpose) and therefore supposing our differences about many things there written, strenuously insisteth upon it as our indispensable duty—*That we study the things that make for peace, keep the unity of the spirit,—consider one another to provoke unto love, and good works,—mark them that cause divisions,—comfort, edify, submit to, and bear with one another;—receive the weak in faith; not (οὐς διὰ τῶν αἰσθητικῶν διαφορῶν) judging or making a difference between them and ourselves, on the account of doubtful opinions.—Be persuaded every man in his own mind; but not judge our brother, or put a stumbling block in his*

his way; for that he who in any of these (disputable) things serveth Christ is accepted of God, &c. In this Catholic stile we have line upon line, precept upon precept.—But, that one party of true believers in Christ, should have such a dominion over the consciences and religious practices of the rest, as to make new laws of Communion at the Lord's Table for them; or so to interpret those already made by Christ, as to prejudice the common right of their brethren to partake with them there; or, that they should have any authority to exclude their fellow Christians, the enjoyment of that privilege with themselves, upon account of unavoidable differences about the *non-essentials* of the Christian profession (which is what our brethren seem to take for granted) of *this*, I say, or of any thing like it, there is not the least mention in the sacred canon; much less any such *clear and exprefs direction*, as the case evidently requires.

And as to the scripture *examples*, they appear to me every where intirely in favour of *catholic communion*. In the *Old Testament*,

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we find, not only *Melchisedec* and *Abraham*, but *Moses* and *Jethro*, and others, communing occasionally together in sacred ordinances, notwithstanding their different forms of religion; and, which is still more to the purpose, in the *New Testament* we read, that the primitive Christians, notwithstanding very many, and some very wide differences amongst them, upon points they thought of the highest consequence,* *were together, with one accord in breaking of bread* (*viz.* at the Lord's Supper) *as well as prayers*. And when necessarily separated, and settled in distinct churches, they still preserved their common unity, and mutually acknowledged, and received to their communion, their respective members, upon all requisite occasions: if at any time they did otherwise, and attempted an imposing pre-eminence, or excluding power, they were zealously opposed, and severely reprov'd by the apostles (*Act xv.*

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1, 10.

* Such as circumcision for instance which the Jewish converts thought essential to salvation *Act. xv. 1, 2, &c.*

1, 10. 3 John 9, 10.) as violators of the rights of conscience, enemies to the *liberty wherewith Christ had made them free*, and common disturbers of the peace, and visible uniformity of the universal church, which they had been taught to preserve with the greatest tenderness and veneration, as of the highest importance to the credit and interest of their holy religion. [Consult Acts i. 14, 23. chap. ii. 42. chap. xv. 1,—10,—24,—28. Rom. xii. 4, 5. chap. xiv. 1. to the end. chap. xv. 1, 7. chap. xvi. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 3, 10—15. chap. xi. 16, 18. chap. xii. 12, 13, 20, 28. chap. x. 16, 17. Ephes. ii. 13, 14, 22. Gal. iii. 28. 3 John 9, 10, &c. &c.] All which being duly considered, I should think it must appear to every unprejudiced mind, that limiting the communion of the Lord's Table, to a uniformity of judgment and practice in the lesser disputable points of religion, not essential to the Christian profession, is contrary to the principles upon which Christian churches ought to be founded, the design of the ordinance itself; and not only *unwar-*
ranted

ranted, but even *opposed* by the word of God.
And,

5. If, with what has been said, we also thoroughly consider the nature and tendency of this *limiting imposing power* in the church, we must acknowledge it is in *fact* (however contrary the intention) nothing less than assuming a legislative authority in the kingdom of Christ; a lording it over, and judging his heritage in matters of conscience, and the enjoyment of their evangelical privileges, to which he has entitled them by his general charter;—and consequently a bold and presumptuous invasion not only of *their rights*, but even of the *sacred prerogatives of his sovereignty*, teaching the fear of the Lord by the precepts of men. Nor are the actual, and but too common *effects* of it, with respect to the honour of Christ, the edification and comfort of many pious Christians in particular, and the union, peace and prosperity of the church in general, less *alarming* than *evident*.—For by the exercise of this power, do we not as much as in *us* lies, compel our fellow Chris-

tians to live in at least the *neglect* of that *express* command of Christ *do this in remembrance of me?*—deprive them of an ordinance necessary for the improvement of their graces and virtues, and peculiarly adapted to that end? thrust out of the *visible* church with marks of *dishonour* and *reprobation* (*for what more can we do to reprobates themselves?*) those whom Christ himself has brought into it; and sealed with his spirit as the *heirs of glory?* and thus by making no difference between the *pious* and *prophane*, those that *serve God*, and those that *serve him not*, do we not confound the church with the world, the kingdom of Christ with that of satan? or, by forcing our brethren or ourselves into separate communities, open a wide door for strife and contention, and the setting up of many opposite interests, or little spiritual factions in the church, who by their mutual jealousies, and unchristian animosities, actually *divide the house of God against itself?*—are not these (more or less) the effects, the *common* and *visible*, and indeed the *natural*, and many of them the *inevitable* effects, of a too severe and
narrow

narrow limitation of church communion; even among some *well-meaning* Christians? and are they not at best very serious and alarming?

But when this evil spirit of *imposition*, happens to get possession of violent and malevolent minds, not unfrequent amongst the *sticklers* for religion; it breaks through all restraints and leads the unhappy creatures, with a blind and furious zeal to sacrifice, not only christian moderation and charity, the common unity and peace of Christian societies, their own reason and humanity, but, too often, even the *Bible* itself to support their pretended *religious* interest; *i. e.* their own little peculiarities, and senseless superstition; to the great encrease of the numbers and joy of the enemies of Christianity. And, indeed, from whence come all the shocking evils, which fill so many pages (I might say volumes) of ecclesiastical history *;—from whence our re-

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* It is remarked by *Grotius*, that he that reads Ecclesiastical history, reads nothing but the folly and roguery of bishops and churchmen. *Grot. Epip. p. 22.*

religious wars and *fightings*, burnings and massacres; the solemn cruelties of the popish inquisitions, and the long train of holy violences, that have sometimes almost depopulated kingdoms;—from whence originally come they, but from this *lust* of spiritual law-making; or the exercise of an unwarrantable imposing power, and mere human authority in the church of God?—

And is it not matter of the most serious grief and astonishment, that a spirit which favours so strongly of antichristian infallibility and persecution; animates every system of spiritual tyranny; and has been for ages the sad cause of so many sins and miseries in the church; the disgrace of the Christian name; the bane of vital religion; and contributed so much to the triumphs of infidelity; should meet with the countenance it has done, and still does, in the Christian world; and its rigid and oppressive dictates, become *fundamental principles*, in the ecclesiastical constitution, of even *protestant societies*!

6. I readily acknowledge, that there are
many

many, both of the established church, and the dissenters, who profess to make it matter of conscience, to maintain a stricter communion than what I am pleading for; whose piety and charity, in all other instances are so conspicuous, and carry with them such strong marks of Christian sincerity, that it would be doing them great injustice, so much as to *suspect* them of acting knowingly from uncharitable principles, or with any injurious or oppressive design. They cannot indeed but acknowledge, that by this strictness, they must unavoidably exclude from their church fellowship, *many*, whom they really love and esteem as their brethren in Christ; and consequently oblige them to set up separate societies, in order to discharge the duty, and enjoy the advantages of worshipping God according to their consciences: But then they think they excuse themselves, by pleading—that they very readily allow their brethren a right to such a separation, and are desirous of treating them, in all other respects, as their fellow Christians; and therefore cannot fairly be said to impose on them.—That where opi-

nions and practices are really different (tho' in lesser things only) and whilst our infirmities are so many and great, the grace of charity, and blessings of peace, may, upon the whole, be better preserved and cultivated in separate, than in mixed communities.—That in the latter, truth must be slighted, if not given up, and error countenanced;* or many angry contentions be continually arising, on one side or the other;—and that as they do in their consciences believe this strictness, most pleasing to God, and the necessary means of preserving the purity of religion, they think it their duty to maintain it.

In answer to this, I would here particularly apply, with some necessary additions, what has been in the general hinted before, (*viz.*)

(1) That it is their duty not only to love their brethren, and shew their charity in some instances,

*In the disputes between the Jews and Gentiles in the apostles days, though the Gentiles were in the right, yet the apostles did not encourage their separation from the Jews, or the Jews from them, but taught both to bear with, and love one another.

instances, that may happen to suit with their particular favourite opinions, but also in the more self-denying; especially in such as concern their spiritual welfare, and the unity of the church; which by falling more directly under the notice of the public, *distinguish* them as the *disciples of Christ*; as the communion of the sacred Supper most evidently does.—

(2) That as they themselves allow this institution to be as much the duty of their Christian brethren whom they reject, as their own; and as neither scripture, nor reason, make any qualifications *necessary* in order for *one set* of Christians to commune with *another* therein, but what are *necessary* to the *communion itself*; it follows, that the insisting upon any other; so far as to reject their brethren, merely for the want of them, is, in effect (though not in design) a *real imposition* on them, as it forces them to the unhappy alternative, of either living in the neglect of an important and desirable duty; or of setting up separate communities; and thereby dividing (at least) the

the *external uniformity* of the *visible catholic church*, which they think it is both their duty and glory to preserve.—(3) That difference in opinion and practice, in the *non-essentials* of the Christian profession, is so far from being any where in scripture, allowed as a reason for compelling one another into separate communities, that on the contrary, it is used as a reason for our greater zeal and care to preserve our union; and consequently, as an occasion of more fully and clearly exemplifying the fervency and sincerity of our charity.—(4) That *dissentient separations* in such a body as the church, whose characteristic is a *divine union* as *the body of Christ*, is absurd and preposterous; only excusable, when through unwarrantable impositions, and corruptions intolerably offensive to conscience, it becomes unavoidable; and therefore ought not by such impositions and offences to be promoted.—(5) That as the principle upon which our brethren go in this case, is in its own nature a *dividing one*, it cannot

cannot justly be supposed, to do *more* towards the preservation of *peace* and *charity*, than the contrary principle I am pleading for, which as naturally leads to *forbearance* and *unity*.——(6) That in order to communion upon the more catholic plan, *no truth* is required to be given up, nor its *real* importance any way lessened; but only *doubtful questions* about it, kept in their proper place; viz. a due subordination to *plain indisputable duties*. Nor, indeed, does truth itself require, or its importance justify, any measures that are in themselves wrong, or unwarranted by the word of God, to support it.*——(7) That though the paying a reverential regard to the dictates of conscience, argues a degree of piety and virtue highly commendable; yet they

* Truth is great and will prevail, and that the more speedily and effectually, the more we leave her to her own native strength: the imaginary succours dictated by our diffidence and blind zeal, are as impertinent as the profane hand of *Uzzah* supporting the ark.

they should remember that even *conscience itself* may be mistaken; and has sometimes been pleaded in defence of the most furious persecutions; as the apostle *Paul* himself witnesses, *Acts* xxiii. 9.—And as our brethren, from the very nature and tendency of their rigid principles, are more particularly in danger of falling into the mistakes of unwarrantable zeal, they should be so much the more careful that their consciences be indeed rightly informed, and kept within their proper limits, (*viz.*) *an intire subjection to the express laws and appointments of Christ* themselves, and not the dogmatical interpretations of fallible men; and where the question is doubtful, always incline to the *forbearing and uniting*, and not (as they are too apt to do) to the *imposing and dividing* side. For the want of this care, conscience many times contracts a false and superstitious tenderness, and under a notion of just zeal for truth, and the purity of those institutions, which concern the *lesser appendages* of religion, leads us to offend against the *essential* duties

duties of *peace and charity*, without a due regard to which, the most scrupulous exactness about the other, will be of no more account in the sight of God, than the punctilious *righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees*; and an evidence, that like them we have not learnt the meaning of that text,—*I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*, which our Lord has taught us to apply as a general rule in all such cases, Matt. xxi. 1—7—21.—(8.) However certainly in the right on this head, our brethren may think themselves, they are still as certainly but *fallible men*; and therefore their confidence can give them no authority, to make their own *private interpretations of doubtful unessential peculiarities*, conditions of communion at the Lord's table, so as thereby to exclude those that differ from them.—And thus (9.) Upon the whole, I cannot but conclude, That if this *narrow dividing* notion were intirely given up, and a *free and open communion* maintained amongst us; in which ALL, who appeared to hold the doctrines, and practise the

*the duties essential * to the Christian character and profession might join* (still preserving a due regard to the support of particular societies †) it would be so far from producing any consequences prejudicial to the interest of *truth* and *peace*; that on the contrary, it would be attended with many the most desirable and salutary to both.—Our frequent meeting one another, and worshipping together in so solemn and endearing an ordinance, as the Lord's Supper, upon such mutually condescending and generous principles, as we should do in the case supposed; must certainly have (besides the general advantages) a particular and powerful tendency,
to

* I say *essential*, because where people differ in what they deem essential to Christianity they cannot hold communion together as the apostle intimates, 2 Cor. vi. 14, &c. The determining therefore, what these essentials are, requires great care, judgment and candour.

† See chap. ii. prop. iv. and notes. Ch. iv. prop. iii. sect. 4. and notes.

to subdue our mutual prejudices—remove the occasions of our jealousies and animosities—keep in awe the angry and contentious passions—harmonize our spirits—inspire us with the most ardent and sincere friendship,—and thus enable us to carry our social unity to the greatest heights of perfection it is capable of, this side heaven: which would not only fully justify our pretensions, to the most peaceable and benevolent system of religion in the world, but also more clearly evince the divine original of the church, and render her appearance far more illustrious and venerable than ever, since the apostolic times—and presage, at least, the accomplishment of those glorious prophecies, concerning her future greatness and felicity; *When her light shall come—and the nations of the saved shall walk in her brightness.—When she shall have no need either of the sun or of the moon; but God himself and the Lamb dwell in her as her light and glory, &c. Isa. lx. 1. Rev. xxi. 1, &c.—*And when, as *Archbishop Tillotson* expresses it, all disputes

putes shall be made an end of, not BY CANONS AND DECREES, BUT BY THE CHARITY THAT NEVER FAILETH.— Effects these, worthy of every Christian's most ardent prayers, and unwearied endeavours; but which, I may venture to say, no *imposing separating zeal*, in favour of the unessential modes of religion, can have the least tendency to produce.*

7. But, however just and reasonable this amicable coalition amongst all serious Christians may be in itself; however desirable and necessary to the perfection of *social religion*, the

* It is said, that the rigid adherents to the established religion in Scotland have their solemn days of fasting and prayer, to deprecate the wrath of God from the land, provoked by the toleration granted to those who differ from them; and to beseech the Almighty to restore to them the power of persecution and church tyranny. *Glaßf.* vol. 2. p. 473.—What an impious farce is this! What a reproach to protestantism, to Christianity, to human nature!

the honour of the Christian profession, and true felicity and glory of the church, &c. It has, even in *this country of protestantism and liberty*, many and great difficulties opposed to it, from—*The ambitious views of the politicians of this world—The selfish intemperate zeal of the leaders of all parties—The natural weaknesses and prejudices of the common people—The tyranny of long settled rules and customs amongst some—and the authority of legal establishments, too limited and partial amongst others*; so that there is little or no hope of its being very soon effected: though nevertheless our duty, to do all we can consistently towards it. And indeed by how much the more great and numerous the difficulties are, with so much the more spirit and resolution, prudence and patience, should our endeavours to remove them be exerted.

To this end it will be particularly necessary on all sides—That we divest ourselves, as far as possible, of all prejudice, anger, pride, petulance, obstinacy; and inquire after *truth*, with sobriety, patience, candour; an

P

humble

humble dependence on the influences of the divine Spirit, and fervent and constant prayers for them.—That we are willing to be convinced of our errors, and, when upon due deliberation we are so, as willing to renounce them, and embrace truth, however unfashionable and unpopular her appearance, or however contrary to our former opinions. With this temper of mind we should particularly read and study the *BIBLE*. There the pure and uncorrupted fountains of truth and wisdom, of righteousness and peace, and real religion, are laid open to all (amongst us) that are willing to partake of them; so that the unlearned, as well as the learned, those that have neither time nor capacity to enter into nice disquisitions, and long and curious reasonings about religion, as well as those that have; if they sincerely endeavour to enter into the pure and genuine spirit of that *divine book*, get it transfused into their hearts, embrace its plain unsophisticated meaning, and practically conform to it in their lives; —shall

—shall assuredly know so much of the mind of God in it, as is necessary to their comfort and usefulness, and the right discharge of their respective duties in this world, and their complete and everlasting felicity in the next, Hos. vi. 3. Prov. ii. 2, 3. Matt. vii. 7. John vii. 17. James i. 5. 21, 22. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. John vi. 47. clearly prove. Nor is there any thing (as a means) that can so effectually cure, or preserve us from, that *ignorance and corrupt narrowness of mind*, from whence all our dissensions and separations arise; or so effectually enlarge and warm our hearts, with that pure and fraternal benevolence, necessary to a genuine and lasting union in the duties of religion, as such an *intimate and influential acquaintance* with the scriptures; or, as the apostle expresses it, *the word of Christ dwelling in us richly, in all wisdom*, Col. iii. 16. The free use of the *Bible and common sense*, was, under the Divine Blessing, the principal means of our deliverance from the darkness and miseries of Popish superstition and ty-

ranny; and *this* must be the means of improving and perfecting our liberty, in opposition to all the remains of that enslaving spirit, too prevalent amongst mistaken protestants.

8. Finally, while the case is such, that through our own weakness or that of others, we *cannot* carry our CHARITY so *high*, as to partake of the Lord's Supper together at the same table; or otherwise worship together in the same forms; while I say this is our unhappy case, let us be extremely careful, to exercise and exemplify that grace in mutual forbearance, and all other offices of Christian condescension and goodness.—Let us *put away all wrath, strife, bitterness, anger, clamour, and evil-speaking—and put on bowels of mercy, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness; believing all things, hoping all things possible in favour of those that differ from us* (Ephes. iv. 31. Col. iii. 6. 12. 1 Cor. xiii. 7.) that the means used to support our (at present) unavoidable separations may not encrease and aggravate them, or
 prove

prove the occasions of a real alienation of heart from one another, and thereby injure the *internal power*, as well as the *external form* of godliness; always remembering it is the *express*, the *repeated* command, and even *dying charge* of the blessed Redeemer—That WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER—Which he doubtless intended, should take place, and be universally observed by us, notwithstanding any of our unhappy differences in opinions, not really affecting the essentials of our religious profession; and that as a necessary preservative from the bad consequences, those differences might otherwise be attended with. By which *love*, we are not to understand that *general philanthropy*, or *good-will* we owe to *all mankind*; though that is also clearly taught, and strongly enforced in the gospel, as our indispensable duty; but that *particular affectionate esteem, kindness and complacency, which arises from some peculiarly near and endearing relation*.—Such a relation there is between all true Christians, as the spiritual children of the

same heavenly Father—redeemed by the same precious blood of Christ—sanctified by the same gracious Spirit—members of the same body, and joint heirs and expectants of the same inheritance in the world to come. And the possessing the genuine principles of this divine affection, and (as we have opportunity) the actual exercise of it towards all the disciples of Christ, is in scripture made an essential part of the Christian character; without which we cannot justify to the world, or even to our own hearts, our pretensions to it. John xiii. 35. *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye love one another.* 1 John iii. 14. *We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* All which is farther enforced by the example of Christ, the apostles and primitive Christians; by the tenor of the gospel, and the unutterable pleasure, which the consciousness and effects of this truly Christian virtue must give to our minds.

Many

Many of our persecuting zealots, indeed, admit of all this, and would not be thought to want *Christian charity*, notwithstanding even their cruel treatment of those that differ from them. But then, they confine *Christianity* to their own particular *opinions*; and its *charity*, to their own *party*; brand all other Christians with the odious epithets of *heretic*, *schismatic*, and the like; which in *their* language means nothing less than *real enemies to Christ and his religion*; and from thence conclude it is their duty not only to *hate them with perfect hatred* (misapplying the words of the psalmist, *Psal.* cxxxix. 21, 22.) but also to punish them to the utmost of their power; as, if not the fittest means to reclaim them, yet the just desert of the crime of differing from them, and a necessary vindication of the honour of God and his church.* Not considering

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that

* If you confine the mercies of God to your own sect only, it is an opinion that not only ascribes great partiality to God, but tends to introduce cruelty and inhumanity into the

that the gospel of Christ gives no authority or encouragement to its believers, to punish even *infidels* themselves, as *such*; or deprive them of any of their natural or civil rights and liberties; but on the contrary commands them *to live peaceably with, and do good unto all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; the weapons of our warfare in these cases, being spiritual, not carnal.* Much less will it warrant, any oppressive measures towards those who bear the Christian name, and, according to the light given them, endeavour to support the credit of it, by a conscientious regard to all Christian duties, merely because they happen to differ from them.

But the *ignorance* of these unhappy people, which is the mother of this bitter zeal, as well as of their devotion, is extremely gross, and temper of every man so perswaded. We easily come to think it a virtue to hate those whom God hates, and thus we extinguish the noblest grace of the gospel. *Bp. London Disc. vol. 2. disc. 5.*

and every way deplorable.—They take their idea of the *Christian* (if they have any at all) not from *the Bible*, the only authentic standard in this case, but from their own rash prejudices, the fashionable and current opinions of their country, or the peculiarities of the sect or party they have been brought up in, &c. And he that does not answer to their wild and senseless conceits, is marked out as a fit object of their persecuting spleen and resentment. Whereas would they do themselves and their cause so much justice, as to consult the Divine Word, with consideration and candour, they must be convinced, that the *true Christian character*, is really formed upon principles infinitely more generous and rational, than national prejudices, the byasses of a narrow education, or the peculiarities of any party whatsoever.—The Christian, as they might be there informed,—feels, and therefore, cordially believes the Bible as a divine revelation—puts his hope and trust in its promises—repents sincerely of his sins, and de-
votes

votes himself to the will of the Deity—
Hath an heart habitually awed with the
majesty, and encouraged by the *benignity*
of the divine perfections; and therefore fears
and loves the great possessor of them above
all—Devoutly and constantly worships him;
and, whether in the forms established, or
tolerated, approved or condemned by men,
does it in *spirit and in truth*.—Conscious of
the price of his redemption, his filial rela-
tion to the blessed God, and his interest in
the glorious prospects opened to his faith
in *another world*; he endeavours to keep
himself unspotted from the *pollutions*, and
to live above the *flatteries* and *terrors* of *this*.
—Makes it his constant and watchful care to
demonstrate the power of his faith, and the
purity of his hope, by an humble imitation
of the example of Christ; in sobriety,
chastity, justice, mercy, and all the duties
of self-government and benevolence, the
solitary and the social life;—Gratefully ac-
knowledges his obligations to the grace of
the Holy Spirit for all this—and refers the
acceptance

acceptance of his person and services, to the Divine efficacy of the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, as his ONLY Mediator.

—This is THE CHRISTIAN; at least these are the principal outlines of his *character*.—

A character truly excellent and amiable; that gives *real* greatness to the most exalted monarch, and worth and dignity to the poorest slave; does the highest honour to our reason, and will be the glory and joy of our immortality.—A character therefore, that under whatever religious denomination amongst us it appears, justly claims that *particular esteem*, and affectionate regard, the great *Lord of Christians* has commanded to be paid to it, by all his disciples; but in comparison of which, all nominal or real distinctions, founded on the mere modes of faith and worship, are *little and trifling*; and the devout bigotry, and fanatical rage, with which they are too often supported, to the last degree contemptible, and indeed to be lamented as the reproach not only

of

of the Christian name, but even of human nature.*

May

* Lest any of my readers should mistake my pleas for *moderation* and *charity*, and imagine they encourage a *cold indifference* in religion; or that I think it no matter what *opinions* we entertain, provided we are friends to *liberty*, I take this opportunity to assure them that nothing can be farther from my intention. I would not wish any man *indifferent*, even to the *modes* and *forms* of religion; but think it is his duty to endeavour to get the best information he can concerning them, and religiously and steadily follow the light of his conscience in a practical regard to what appears to him to be right. Much less would I be thought to countenance a *sceptical lukewarmness*, in respect of any of those great doctrines that enter into the *essentials* of Christian worship, and the truly *gracious* scheme of salvation by Christ; an evil greatly to be lamented, as already too prevalent, and as leading the way to that apostacy from the profession of Christianity, to Deism, which so shockingly distinguishes the present times. But what I mean is, that *our zeal for God should be according to knowledge*; proportioned

May the blessed Spirit more abundantly illuminate all our minds, and direct our dutiful inquiries into the good and acceptable will of God, that while our hearts glow with that truly pious zeal for the support and propagation of the *peculiar doctrines* and worship of the gospel, so justly due to them as the necessary means of restoring
our

to the rank and importance of its objects; and in respect of those of the highest rank and greatest importance, always governed by that gentle and benign spirit of *evangelical philanthropy*, which shines in all the doctrines and precepts, temper and conduct, of *Christ* and his *apostles*. And I am seriously of opinion, and wish all my readers would as seriously consider it, that *real Christianity* will never thoroughly prevail and flourish in the world, till the professors of it are brought to be upon better terms with one another; lay aside their mutual jealousies and animosities, and live as brethren in sincere harmony and love; but which I apprehend will never be, till conscience is left entirely free; and the plain BIBLE become in FACT, as well as PROFESSION, the ONLY rule of their religious faith and practice.

our nature to its true grandeur and felicity; we may also feel a warm concern for that LIBERTY, CHARITY, and MORAL PURITY, the gospel so strongly inculcates; and which the *church* in general, and every *Christian society* in particular, is designed by Christ, to cultivate and exemplify to the world, as the *distinguishing characteristics* of his kingdom.—
AMEN.

FINIS.



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